Household Demand for Schooling in Ghana

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FOREWORD

This report presents the findings of a study of the household demand for schooling that was conducted in Wa, Wenchi, and Mpohor Wassa East districts in September and October 2002. The primary objective of this study was to provide up-to-date information on education among children age 5-15 in order to inform the development, monitoring, and evaluation of basic education programmes in Ghana. The study focused on the household decision-making process surrounding children's school attendance.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of a number of organisations and individuals that contributed to the success of the study. First I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Ghana. Funding for the overall DHS EdData Activity is provided by USAID's Office of Education in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade. Thanks also to ORC Macro for providing technical assistance. I would also like to acknowledge the close collaborative efforts between the staff of the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service in planning the study and conducting training. Finally, I am grateful to the education authorities in the three districts, the community leaders, and the parents and children who generously gave their time to provide the information on which this report is based.

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PREFACE

This study was a collaborative effort that involved many people from the University of Ghana, in particular from ISSER and the African Studies Centre. Dr. Albert Awedoba directed the data collection and analysis. He was ably assisted by five research assistants who played the role of field workers interviewing parents and guardians as well as children and community leaders. The research assistants were: Angela Gyasi-Gyamerah, Dery Marcelinus, Edward Nanbigne, Lydia Okae, and Noble Osei-Bonsu. These people deserve our sincere gratitude for a job well done.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study of the household demand for schooling that was conducted in the fall of 2002 in three districts in Ghana. The study was conducted for USAID/Ghana to provide information useful for planning education interventions in Ghana. The Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) of the University of Ghana at Legon collected and processed the data under a contract with ORC Macro. ORC Macro education specialists designed the study and provided technical assistance for all aspects of the research. The tasks of analysis and writing were shared between the principal investigator from ISSER and personnel from ORC Macro.

This chapter first presents the study objectives, followed by a discussion of the need for the study, and a review of the relevant literature on the household demand for schooling. Chapter 2 presents the research questions and assumptions guiding the study and Chapter 3 reviews the research methods employed. Chapter 4 presents findings on parents' desire to have their children in school, including the perceived benefits of schooling and the costs of schooling. Chapter 5 discusses the complexities of household decision-making on when a child is judged to be "ready" to start attending school. Chapter 7 addresses the circumstances surrounding children dropping out of school. And finally, Chapter 8 synthesises and summarises the findings of this study.

1.2 Objectives

This study examines the factors affecting parents' and guardians' decisions about whether to send school-age children to primary school at all, or to have children do something else. The study also examines families' decisions about whether to keep children in school once they have started attending, and the challenges in doing so. Families may send children to school, keep them home to work, send them to other households to work and/or attend school, allow them to spend time as they choose, or some combination of the above. The ultimate goal of this study was to understand how families make decisions about schooling. However, the perspective of parents on having a child in school can best be understood in light of the many options available for a child's activities.

The study collected information on the costs of schooling to households, on parents' perceptions of the benefits of schooling, and on the quality and relevance of schooling. The study also collected information from key informants in the community and from staff at the school serving each community. Particular emphasis was placed on the household approach to making decisions about schooling and on variation in decisions made for boys and for girls. A better understanding of the context in which schooling decisions are made in three districts provides information useful for planning interventions to improve basic education, including a possible nationally-representative household survey to investigate issues surrounding household demand for schooling nationwide.

One note on terminology is important here, and that is the difference between enrolment and attendance, and the way the term 'attendance' is used in this study. Enrolment refers to the listing of children's names on official school rosters. This study is not concerned with examining enrolment records at the school level. Instead, this study is focused on the question of whether children are sent to—or attend—school at all. Attendance does not refer to the frequency with which children who generally attend school actually go to school. In other words, the study is concerned with how and why children attend school at all, or do not attend school at all, rather than the frequency of absenteeism among pupils.

1.3 The need for the study

This study was conducted in a context where decades of effort to increase enrolment rates have not yielded the expected results and there has been no meaningful increase in primary school enrolment rates over the last decade. In 1991, UNESCO estimated the primary school gross enrolment ratio (GER) at 76 (83 among male and 70 among female youth). In 2000, a Republic of Ghana paper tracking the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy estimated the primary GER at 78 (71 for female youth). The GER was estimated to be lowest in the Northern (46), Upper East (49) and Upper West (51) regions. Various kinds of support to the education sector, including efforts to reduce the monetary costs of schooling to households, have not resulted in higher enrolment rates overall.

As discussed in the literature review below, there are some data available on dropout and repetition rates and some information on reasons for non-enrolment among school-age children in Ghana. There is, however, little information available about decision-making at the household level that determines whether children ever attend school, and if they do, how families decide when children should begin school. There is also limited information available on how decisions are made about children dropping out of school, such as who is involved in the decision and what factors and circumstances affect the decision. This study of the household demand for schooling was designed to provide insight into these events in the households under study.

1.4 A review of the literature

In addition to data on enrolment rates, some information is available on the age children enrol in primary 1 for the first time, dropout and repetition rates, and reasons for non-enrolment among school-age children in Ghana. This section reviews the available information for Ghana and discusses evidence from other countries that may be relevant to circumstances in Ghana.

Age of first-time enrolment

The official starting age for primary school in Ghana is age 6. The 1998 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found that just over half (52 percent) of primary school pupils were at the appropriate age for the primary school class attended, while 38 percent were over-age.[1] A household census conducted in 1994 and 1996 in three circuits in Ghana found both that 15 percent of children in primary class 1 were underage and that 60 percent of those

[1]On time for a class was defined as being either the target age for the class or one year older. In other words, age 6-7 for class 1, age 7-8 for class 2, etc. Over-age was defined as being more than one year older than the target starting age for the class.

enrolling in primary school enrolled at an age greater than age 6 (Fentiman, Hall, and Bundy, 1999).[2]

Fentiman, Hall, and Bundy (1999) also investigated parents' perceptions of children's age and their readiness to start attending school. Parents, in focus groups, were asked why school-age children did not attend school, and some replied that a child was "too young" or not yet "grown," even though children were of school age. These findings are consistent with previous studies of parental determination of the right time for children to start school, and may reflect judgments about both physical and cognitive development necessary for a child to start school.

Dropout and repetition rates

According to Ministry of Education statistics, in 2000, 20 percent of the male and 30 percent of the female pupils starting primary school dropped out before completing primary school. A household census conducted in 1994 and 1996 in three circuits in Ghana suggested that the highest dropout rates in those areas were in primary one, with rates declining up through the primary classes (Fentiman, Hall, and Bundy, 1999).

Data suggest that repetition rates at the primary level of schooling are relatively low in Ghana. In the 1997-1998 school year, about 4 percent of primary school pupils were repeating a class. The fact that a high percentage of primary school pupils is over-age for class, while repetition rates are low, is consistent with other data suggesting that a sizeable percentage of pupils starts school overage.

Reasons for non-enrolment among school-age children

There may be many reasons children of basic education age (age 6-15) do not attend school. Before launching into a discussion of some of these reasons, it should be noted that there are two groups of children who are not enrolled in school: those who have never attended school and those who used to attend school but have since dropped out of school. The reasons for never having attended school and for dropping out of school may be similar, but may also differ. For instance, it may be that the perceived quality of schooling is more likely to have an effect on children dropping out of school than on children never enrolling in school.

There is evidence that if parents and guardians[3] consider schooling not useful or potentially harmful to children, children may not be sent to school. As suggested by a recent study in several communities in the north and southern parts of Ghana, children attending school at all or beyond a certain point may be seen by parents to be rebellious—unwilling to do the expected manual labour, scornful of traditional authority, and so on (Stephens, 2000).

Some parents may not consider the benefits of schooling great enough to warrant sending a child to school. If schools are seen to provide little or nothing of great value to a child's life, the child may not be sent to school or may be withdrawn from school after developing the skills seen to be important—such as literacy and numeracy.

[2] Ziope circuit, Ho district, Volta region; Amankwa circuit, Afram Plains, Eastern region; and Fumbisi circuit, Builsa district, Upper East region.

[3] From this point onward, 'parents' includes biological parents and those adults who are guardians of children, regardless of the biological relationship.

It is also possible that the perceived quality and the environment of the schooling available to a household have an effect on enrolment decisions. School quality is a broad concept that can include a wide range of issues, including but not limited to:

- the adequacy and condition of school amenities and facilities (such as classroom blocks, availability of water, toilets) and equipment and supplies (such as furniture, textbooks)

- the qualifications and performance of school staff and the school environment (both academic and professional qualifications, teacher attendance and time spent on learning in classes, patterns of punishment for pupils)

- pupil performance (on examinations, in making the transition from one class or level of schooling to the next, in terms of becoming literate and numerate and learning languages).

In addition, there is considerable evidence that in some cases, the monetary and/or non-monetary costs of schooling to households may be insupportable, or may be seen to exceed the perceived benefits of schooling. A child's family may not be able to bear the cost of school fees, uniforms or school clothing and shoes, supplies, and other costs related to schooling. Or the household may require the child's assistance with work around the home, in the family holdings, at the market, or for an employer.

Reasons for non-enrolment may vary according to child characteristics (sex, age, birth order, relationship to the household head, perceived academic abilities or interest in schooling, etc.), household characteristics (wealth, religion, educational attainment among parents and household decision-makers, etc.), community characteristics (such as urban or rural location), and other critical characteristics.

Child characteristics. In many countries, girls are less likely than boys ever to attend primary school or to complete primary school, and considerably less likely to continue on to secondary school and tertiary levels of schooling. Families may not invest in schooling for girls because the benefits of schooling are seen to go to the family she will marry into rather than to the girl's parents and blood relatives. There may be particular concern about school-going girls losing their virginity before marriage (Stephens, 2000). In other instances, families may want to educate both sons and daughters, but have insufficient resources. If the benefits of schooling are seen to be higher for sons than for daughters—for instance, because sons are more likely to get wage-paying work and/or to support the household—then families may educate sons rather than daughters.

A child's age and birth order may also be considered in enrolment decisions. Parents may believe that a child should not start school until a particular age, regardless of the national guidelines on the target age for starting school. Or, as discussed earlier, parents may decide a child is ready to attend school when he/she is judged to be intellectually, emotionally, or physically mature enough to do so. Age and maturity may also affect a child's perceived ability to make the journey to school. The number of children in a household, or number of boys and girls in the household, may also figure into decisions about which children attend school at what point in time. If boys, for instance, are tasked with looking after cattle, at any given time, one of the boys may not be enrolled in school because he is needed to tend the cattle. But as soon as a

younger brother is old enough to take over the duties, the older brother may be enrolled in school, and so on.

Another possible factor involved in enrolment decisions may be the child's relationship to the household head and to other household members. There is some evidence that children of the household head are more likely to attend school than those who are living in households with more distant relatives or with non-relatives. Of course, circumstances matter: A child fostered out to another household primarily to do work in support of the household may be unlikely to be enrolled in school. By comparison, a child fostered out to another household because the new household is near a school may be likely to attend school.

Another set of possible influences on enrolment decisions has to do with perceptions of a child's academic abilities. Children may be considered not to be academically gifted, and so may never be sent to school. Or a child may have had difficulty in school, possibly having to repeat classes of schooling, and so may be withdrawn from school for lack of progress.

Other child characteristics may also be considered in enrolment decisions. For instance, children with physical or mental disabilities or with chronic illnesses may not be sent to school. And those who have no interest in attending, perhaps for a host of reasons, may not be enrolled in school.

Household characteristics. There is evidence across many countries that decisions about children's schooling are correlated with household characteristics. Generally speaking, children are more likely to enrol and persist in school if they are from wealthier households, and if their parents attended school. In addition, in some countries, there may be patterns of enrolment and reasons for non-enrolment by the religious or ethnic background of the household.

Data on reasons for non-enrolment in primary school in Ghana

Several surveys and studies in Ghana have collected data on reasons school-age children are not enrolled in school—whether these children had never attended school or had dropped out of school. These findings are largely consistent with the foregoing discussion. For each 6-15 year-old child in the household not enrolled in school, the 1997 Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey asked why the child did not attend school. The most commonly-given reasons were the need for the child to work in the home or on the family farm (34 percent) and schooling being "too expensive" (29 percent). Less frequently-cited reasons included the school being too far away (7 percent), children failing examinations (5 percent), marriage (4 percent) or pregnancy (3 percent), and illness (2 percent).

In a study of 1,380 children age 6-15 in the Eastern region, Fentiman, Hall and Bundy (2001) found a correlation between height and school enrolment status among children age 6-7. Children age 6-7 who were not enrolled in school were significantly shorter than those enrolled in school.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS 2

This study examines the factors affecting parents' decisions about whether to send school-age children to primary school or have children do something else. The study focuses on factors within the household and at school, although the emphasis is on household dynamics, as reflected in the research questions used to guide the inquiry and the assumptions made at the outset. These questions and assumptions amplify the main study objective, which was to understand how families with school-age children decide whether to send children to school, when to send them, and whether to keep children in school or remove them in order to do other things.

2.1 Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- What options do parents consider for how young children spend their time?
- How do families go about deciding what boys and girls should do?
- How and why do parents decide to send their children to school, or not?
- How do parents decide when a child is "ready" to start school?
- What are the benefits parents see in having their children in school?
- How does a family decide that a child will leave school?
- What are the costs (both monetary and opportunity costs) to households of sending a child to primary school?

The first three questions are formulated to draw attention to what occurs in the home, including how work is allocated to various household members. Young children in Ghana, whether boys or girls, routinely help with household chores and around the farm or fields. Sending them off to school means giving up on their assistance for much of the day. How willing are parents to do this? Are the perceived benefits of schooling sufficient to compensate for the loss of labour?

The question about "readiness" to attend school is critical, since more than half of the children in primary 1 are older or younger than age 6. In this context, it is crucial to understand how mothers and fathers judge a child's readiness to enter primary school. To what extent are parents aware of age: the age of their children, and the recommended age for entry into school? What criteria are used most commonly to make such judgments? In determining when a child is ready to start attending school, what do parents consider?

Getting an accurate reading on parents' perceptions of the benefits of schooling seems critical to an understanding of how families make decisions about schooling, but getting evidence on the subject often proves elusive. It is not clear to what extent parents weigh future benefits against the social and economic costs of school. The issue does not lend itself to directing questioning such as, "How much would you pay to send your child to school?" or "What are the benefits to you and to your child of having your child complete primary school?" As a consequence, this study approached the issue indirectly.

The question about a child leaving school was formulated to focus attention on the family situation that precipitated a child leaving school. In many cases a sudden change in the family's social or economic situation prompts parents to remove a child. In other instances, the child refuses, for whatever reasons, to continue attending school. Likewise, the question was designed to collect information about circumstances at school when the child dropped out of school.

The opportunity costs of schooling include the value of the time that children spend on schooling that they could otherwise spend in support of the household. For instance, a child who is not in school could otherwise spend time taking care of younger brothers and sisters, farming, or earning money. These monetary and opportunity costs of schooling may be difficult for some households to bear and may be so burdensome as to keep children from ever attending school or result in children leaving school. The estimation of the monetary and opportunity costs of keeping a child in school is complicated and can only be approximated in the context of family resources and the need for child labour. To answer this question, this study relies on parents' statements about the costs of schooling and the labour needs within the family.

2.2 Assumptions

At the beginning of the study, a series of assumptions was articulated. These statements about the research or the study population that are expected to be factual may be derived from the study team's research experience, from the social science literature, and from other sources. Assumptions are useful in formulating research questions and identifying issues for investigation.

The assumptions included the following:

- During their primary school-age years (6-11), most children attend school at some point in time.
- Girls are less likely than boys to attend school and are more likely than boys to drop out of school once they have started attending.
- Among young school-age children (age 6-8), the most common reason for not attending school is that the child is perceived not to be 'ready.'
- In spite of the fCUBE programme, the monetary costs of primary schooling to households are considerable.
- Wealthier households are more likely than poorer households to send their children to school.

- Parents who have attended school are more likely to send school-age children to school than are parents who have never attended school.

Evidence supporting these assumptions comes from the literature on education in developing countries that reports on large sample surveys and statistical analyses of data. Data collected for this study of the household demand for schooling were examined to determine to what extent the assumptions were confirmed.

RESEARCH METHODS 3

3.1 Training

The training of research assistants to act as interviewers and transcribers brought together ORC Macro staff, the principal investigator from the University of Ghana, and officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES). ORC Macro planned and directed the training and the sessions were held in ISSER's facilities. Training lasted for ten days inclusive of two days of field-testing the instruments. The training sessions included a review of the principles of qualitative research, the process of interviewing, the development of questioning guides, or instruments, and pre-testing. The pre-test took place in a nearby suburb of Accra. After each pre-test session the team met to review events and fine-tune the instruments.

The research assistants were recruited from a pool of graduate students working with professors at ISSER and the University of Ghana. All research assistants had some prior experience conducting qualitative research. Because interviews were to be conducted in the local language of each community insofar as possible, research assistants were selected according to languages spoken. Of the five research assistants, two spoke Dagaare, the language widely spoken in the Upper West Region, and all spoke dialects of Akan, the language widely spoken and understood in central and southern Ghana.

3.2 Research instruments

The instruments used in the field were developed during training with input from all participants. These instruments consisted of four questioning guides, each one aimed at a specific group of respondents, meant to generate a discussion "story" about how parents and children do or do not demand schooling services.[4] The categories of respondents included the following:

- Parents of children age 5-15
- Children age 12-15 who attended school, had dropped out of school, or had never attended school[5]
- Community leaders
- Head teachers and other school officials

Basic information obtained from each of these respondents included age, educational attainment, and for all respondents except children, occupation or sources of livelihood.

Questioning guide for parents. Interviewers and the principal investigator classified each household in which parents were interviewed by relative wealth (low, medium, high) in the

[4] The questioning guides can be found in Appendix A.

[5] Older school-age children were selected for interviews, rather than younger school-age children, on the assumption that older children would be able to articulate their views and describe their experiences more coherently than would younger children.

context of the given village. While it was planned that both mothers and fathers would be interviewed individually, it was expected that there would be cases in which only one parent would be interviewed, and other situations where the couple would prefer to be interviewed together. The instrument asked parents to list each household member's name, age, and sex. The interviewer then asked a series of questions about each child age 5-15. For each child, questions were asked about his/her daily activities and health, and schooling status (attending school, never attended school, or dropped out of school). Based on the child's schooling status, one of three sets of questions was asked:

1. For a child who had never attended school, questions were asked about how the child spends time (working, playing, and so on), about plans to send the child to school, if any, and the decision-making process surrounding that choice, and what kind of work the parent thinks the child might do as an adult.
2. For a child who was attending school, questions were asked about the child's performance in school, what the child has told the parent about school, what the family spent money on for schooling in the last school year, how it was decided that the child was "ready" to start school at the time he/she first attended, what class the child attends, and what kind of work the parent thinks the child might do as an adult.
3. For a child who had dropped out of school, questions were asked about how the child spends time (working, playing, and so on), what happened at home and school that the child left school, how the child responded to leaving school, the child's age at dropping out and the last class attended, how it was decided that the child was "ready" to start school at the time he/she first attended, and what kind of work the parent thinks the child might do as an adult.

Parents were also asked about their experience with the local school, including contacts with the head teacher and other teachers, the family's contributions to the school, and so on.

Other questioning guides. Questioning guides were also designed for children age 12-15, head teachers, and community informants. The questioning guide for children age 12-15 was designed to collect information similar to that collected from parents. The guides for interviews with head teachers and community informants were similar, covering the following topics: the respondent's professional education career or the leader's role in the community, basic school information, school-community relations, school resources and fund-raising efforts, and the nature and quality of pupil enrolment. Community leaders included chiefs, village headmen, women's leaders, religious leaders, SMC and PTA chairmen, Unit Committee officials and District Assembly members. School officials interviewed included head teachers and circuit supervisors.

3.3 The selection of study sites

The study was conducted in three districts in the country, each within a different region. The regions selected were Upper West in the Northern sector, Brong Ahafo in the Middle belt, and Western in the south-western part of the country. The choice of these regions was based on Ministry of Education (MOE) statistics on school enrolment, which indicate that these regions have lower enrolment than many other regions of the country. In addition, these regions are representative of the three broad historical, geographical and socio-economic divisions of the country.

In each region, one administrative education district was selected. These decisions were taken in consultation with officials of the MOE, the Ghana Education Service (GES), and USAID, and guided by the need to select districts that would be both accessible and representative of the region. The districts selected were Wa in the Upper West region, Wenchi in the Brong Ahafo region, and Mpohor Wassa East in the Western region.

In each of the study districts, two communities were selected as research sites, excluding schools in urban areas. This choice was made at the district level in consultation with officials of the District Education Office (DEO). After the objectives of the study had been explained to the District Director of Education (DDE), the principal investigator met with the Assistant Director responsible for Supervision (AD Supervision) to determine the communities that would be suitable. Schools and the communities serving them were selected according to four criteria: 1) one school considered to be a "good" school and one to be a "not-so-good" school;[6] 2) schools and communities that were accessible by road at the time of year and not too remote for the study team to do its work in the allotted time; 3) schools without active intervention programmes on schooling such as QUIPS; 4) complete primary schools, offering primary 1 through primary 6.

In each study district, the AD Supervision named several schools that he considered to be "good" and "not so good." Following a pre-study visit to each of these schools by the principal investigator, two school communities in each district were selected for inclusion in the study.

The selected communities were Nakore and Tuasa in the Wa district, Degedege and Mallamkrom in the Wenchi district, and Wassa Mampong and Krofofrom in the Mpohor Wassa East district (Daboase circuit). All of these study areas are relatively small rural villages with populations numbering no more than 2,000 residents. The roads that serve the communities are second-class roads that are usable even in the wet season. There did not seem to be much NGO intervention taking place in any of these communities at the time, although in some of them plans seem to be afoot to secure QUIPS or Catholic Relief Services (CRS) support and intervention. In the profile of study communities below, attention will be paid to those features of the communities that impact on the research questions.

3.4 The selection of respondents

Community informants and school staff were selected based on their roles in the community and school. Effort was made to interview both male and female community leaders in each community.

Household selection

The intent of the study was to collect comprehensive, in-depth information about circumstances in each household visited, rather than to collect minimal information about a large number of households and children. In keeping with that intent, the goal was to conduct interviews in roughly 15-20 households per school community. Altogether, interviews were

[6] What constituted a "good" and a "not-so-good" school was determined by the AD Supervision. In most cases, the AD relied on rates of school enrolment in the communities and pupils' performance on examinations to determine which schools fell into these categories.

conducted in about 110 households across the six communities, for an average of about 18 households per community.[7]

The main criterion for choosing a household for the study was the presence of two or more children age 5-15 in the household. The intent was to select some households with two or more children age 5-15 in school, some with no children in school, and some households with at least one child in school and one child out of school. It was recognised, though, that in some communities this balance might be difficult to attain.[8] The objective was to understand the family dynamics in these three sets of circumstances, so as to examine the range of family situations in Ghana. In this way, the study shows the range of likely scenarios for families trying to keep children in school.

Selected households were distributed throughout the community, rather than from one sub-section of the community. For instance, not all the households selected were in very close proximity to the school—but rather, some closer by and others more distant.

Insofar as possible, the selected households were drawn from the range of wealth groups in the community. Some households were comparatively well off financially, others were in the mid-range of wealth, and some were from the poorer parts of the community. In assessing relative wealth, the principal investigator made generalizations based on information from key community informants.

The intent of the study was to interview up to two adults in each household, ideally including both parents of children living in the household. If a child lived with only one parent, that parent was interviewed. If a child lived with a guardian or two guardians and not with his/her parents, we interviewed the guardian(s).

Child selection

In each school community, the intent was to interview about 6 children age 12-15, for a total of about 12 children in each district and 36 children altogether. The study conducted interviews with a total of 34 children.[9] Within each community, roughly equal numbers of children who attended school and did not attend school (including those who had dropped out and those who had never attended) were selected.

3.5 Description of the school communities studied

Wa district study communities: Nakore and Tuasa

In the Wa district, the two selected school communities differ in a number of respects. Nakore School was designated a "not-so-good" school because of its poor enrolment rate. Most people in Nakore are Moslems and the community boasts of one of the oldest mosques in the region. A resident chief heads the village. The people farm corn and yams and rear livestock for

[7] The numbers of households in which interviews were conducted, by district, were: 39 in Wa, 41 in Wenchi, and 30 in Mpohor Wassa East. Altogether there were 425 children age 5-15 in the households: 184 in Wa, 143 in Wenchi, and 98 in Mpohor Wassa East.

[8] Of the 110 households across the six communities, there were 53 households with all children age 5-15 in school, 48 with some children in school, and 9 with no children in school.

[9] Interviews were conducted with 14 children in Wa, 11 in Wenchi, and 9 in Mpohor Wassa East.

sale and for subsistence. There is no wage earning employment in the community. Family sizes are large and an 80-year-old man may head an extended family comprising his own brothers and their families and his children, their wives and their children. The community has a primary school but no Junior Secondary School (JSS). The community has established its own nursery school.

The school in Tuasa was designated a "good" school. The community is small with no more than 1,500 people. Local people are predominantly farmers who grow corn and yams, but also raise livestock, particularly sheep. Like the people of Nakore, the people of Tuasa have no access to paid employment locally. The community members include Moslems, Christians and followers of traditional religions. The local school is a primary school and serves Tuasa and a few other small communities in the neighbourhood. Teachers complain that they cannot find accommodation and are compelled to share rooms with local people. Some teachers either refuse posting to Tuasa or spend more time in Wa than at their post.

Wenchi district study communities: Degedege and Mallamkrom

The communities selected for Wenchi were Degedege and Mallamkrom. They differ in some respects, including location, geographical features, and ethnicity. The school in Degedege was considered to be a "not so good" school. The school in Mallamkrom, on the other hand, was considered to be a good school.

Degedege, a small community a considerable distance from Wenchi, is located in a vegetational zone that can be called secondary forest with savannah grassland features. The people are predominantly farmers growing corn, peppers and yam for subsistence and for sale in the commercial centres of the region. Most of the people speak the Brong dialect of the Akan language as a second language. The community seems to be going through a chieftaincy dispute that has undermined community unity and commitment to the development of the local school. In the Degedege community, there are migrant farmers from the Upper West Region (Dagabas) and some Sisala people. In the community, there seems to be a palpable dichotomy between native Kulango and non-Kulango Northern migrant peoples. The migrants live on the outskirts of the main community.

The community of Mallamkrom derives its name from one Mallam, an immigrant originally from Burkina Faso and the founder of one of a set of villages located along the Sunyani-Techiman road about midway between these two big towns. He is credited with having established Mallamkrom Primary/JSS, the school in question. He is said to have built the original school block from personal resources, to have employed, housed, fed and even paid the teachers himself. The school was chosen because it was considered as a good school, without any recent active NGO intervention.

The school's catchment area comprises the following three communities strung along the road in the Asuogyaman Circuit of the Wenchi District: Ayigbekrom, Konsua and Mallamkrom itself. These are small roadside settlements started by migrant farmers initially involved in the cocoa industry. They come from different locations in Ghana and outside the country. The main ethnic groups seem to be Ewes and Dagabas. There is thus a difference between Degedege where the majority of the people are indigenous Kulangos (Nkoraeg), and Mallamkrom where they are migrant peoples who still maintain connections with their home communities in other parts of the country. The people are still predominantly farmers cultivating maize on a

commercial scale and growing cocoa, oranges and plantain. This is likely the wealthiest of the six communities included in the study.

Mpohor Wassa East district study communities: Wassa Mampong and Krofofrom

Wassa Mampong and Krofofrom, the two communities in Mpohor Wassa East selected as study sites, fall within the Daboase Circuit. There is considerable immigration into both of these communities. The peoples have inheritance and succession practices that are matrilineal.

The community of Krofofrom was selected because its school was rated as "not so good." While the school's performance monitoring test (PMT) score ranked well below that of the Wassa Mampong school, the Krofofrom school has a fuller complement of teachers, an attached JSS, and newly built teachers' quarters. Migrant farmers, most of whom are Gomoa and Fante, live in the community and its satellite cottages; many maintain ties to their home towns. The community produces cocoa, cassava, maize and oil palm products. Over the years, both cocoa and timber production seems to have declined. There is a small market where farm produce is sold on market days.

Wassa Mampong is a fairly large community accessible from the Accra-Takoradi trunk road by a mud road. It is located in the thick rain forest where timber extraction is still economically viable. Many farmers cultivate cocoa and produce oil palm products. There is a wide range of wealth in the community. The people are ethnically Wassa and therefore similar to other Akan people, but there are also Fante migrants in the community. The community lacks basic amenities and facilities such as a health centre, electricity and potable water. The local school, which was established more than forty years ago, offers the primary grades but does not include a JSS. The Wassa Mampong community school was designated as "good." Local people are proud of their school, especially as it ranks high in the PMT in the district.

3.6 The data collection process

Interviews were conducted by two teams of research assistants: one team in Wa district, using the Dagaare language, and the other team in Wenchi and Mpohor Wassa East, using Twi or Twi dialects. These conversations were taped using cassette recorders. The principal investigator accompanied the team to Wa district and then joined the other team to work in the other two districts. The principal investigator interviewed community leaders and teachers in English, taking careful notes of what had been said but not taping the conversations.

The study team and the principal investigator began work in each community with a visit to the chief and conversations with community leaders. Someone from the community was identified to help select the households to be interviewed. That person made a list of local households with children who were age 5-15. From that list, households were selected according to their children's schooling status.

Parents to be interviewed usually were informed a day before the interview to ensure that they would be available. This approach was necessary as most people went to farm and only returned in the evenings. In addition to the parents, children, head teachers, circuit supervisors, and community leaders were also interviewed. Through informal conversations with the circuit supervisors or the education official taking the team to the community for the first time, additional information about the community was gleaned.

The research assistants reviewed the taped interviews (in Dagaare, Twi, or Ga), then translated the conversation into English and wrote it out in long hand. These transcripts were reviewed by the principal investigator and then any inconsistencies or difficult passages were reviewed and revised, in collaboration with the research assistants.

The translations were not necessarily literal, but care was taken not to add or subtract from the content of the discussion. Where the respondent left things unsaid because it was taken for granted that the interviewer understood what was left unsaid, the principal investigator ensured that a comment was inserted in [..] for the benefit of people not familiar with the community background and social organization. The principal investigator read the transcripts before they were typed, named the files, and then sent the texts to be typed.

3.7 Data analysis

Both the principal investigator in Accra and the ORC Macro education specialists analysed data and wrote the report. The analysis was set up by doing an inventory of all the texts available from recordings and notes taken, and identifying several major questions that needed to be answered from the research proposal and field experience.

The analyses proceeded along several lines and involved a number of techniques, including: grouping responses to specific questions by district, by the sex of the respondent, and by the sex of the child; comparing results with the original expectations and assumptions; and considering the context of the responses. The social or ecological context often provides an explanation for the form or content of the response to a question, especially when there are unexpected results.

PARENTS' DESIRE TO HAVE THEIR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

4

The issue of parents' interest in schooling is central to this study since it is assumed that if parents believe that there are no benefits to schooling or that those benefits are outweighed by the costs of schooling, they may not send their children to school or may remove them from school. In some contexts, parents may consider schooling more important for boys than for girls. In Ghana, the MOE and the GES, with assistance from various donors, have for years stressed the importance of schooling for both girls and boys.

4.1 Orienting questions

The research questions identified in the proposal included three questions related to the interest of parents in having their children attend school. These were:

- How do families go about deciding what boys and girls should do?
- How and why do parents decide to send their children to school, or not?
- What are the benefits parents see in having their children in school?

Each of these questions inquires into some aspect of what parents see as the benefits of schooling, in the context of the family's resources and needs. The first question focuses on how families make decisions about how children spend their time—whether on play, work, schooling, or some combination thereof. The question is also related to the work that parents expect their children to do when they are adults, as parents may consider schooling to be a necessary step in learning a trade or qualifying for a profession as opposed to working on a farm or working in petty commerce.

The second question inquires into the reasons parents send their children to school in the first place. The question indirectly asks about a child's readiness for school and about a decision not to send a child at all. The third question asks about what parents see as the benefits of schooling, if any.

Interviewers in the study did not ask any of these questions directly. Rather they asked mothers and fathers what they thought their child would do when they grew up, expecting that they might talk about what going to school might do for the child. The question was asked about each child specifically for all children between age 5-15. While a small number of parents gave more or less the same answer for each of their children, most gave somewhat different answers depending on whether the child was in school, the child's sex, age, and performance in school, and the level of schooling already attained.

The study was conducted in two communities in each of the three districts that served as study sites: one community served by a school that had a reputation as a good school and one that was considered to be a poor school. One of the questions asked of the data was: Were the

answers different overall according to the communities involved? We might expect, for instance, that parents would see a greater benefit to schooling in a community served by a good school.

A second question asked of the data was: Were there systematic differences in the way mothers and fathers talked about what their child would do as an adult? Since men and women play somewhat different roles in family life, would this result in contrasting visions of the future work of their children? Yet a third question asked of the data was: Do we find systematic differences in the way parents talked about the future of their boys versus the future of their girls? Is there a systematic bias toward the schooling and earning potential of boys?

The remainder of this chapter is divided into six sections. Three sections present results from each of the three school districts that served as field sites: Wa district in Upper West region, Wenchi district in Brong Ahafo region, and Wassa Mampong in Western region. These sections address the issue of district-level and community-level contrasts. The next section addresses the differences between how fathers and mothers talk about the future of their children and the following section examines systematic differences in parents' responses by the sex of the child. The final section draws conclusions from the preceding sections of the chapter.

4.2 Wa district study communities: Nakore and Tuasa

Nearly all of the fathers and mothers interviewed in Tuasa and Nakore maintained that attending school is important for their children, but a certain number seemed resigned to the fact that their children would not go to school. More of the parents interviewed in Tuasa and Nakore had children who were not in school than was the case in the communities in the other two districts. Unlike in the other communities, some children in these communities attended Koranic school rather than the public school.

Most of the people of Nakore are Moslem farmers who grow maize and yams as well as raising livestock for sale. There is no wage earning employment in the community. There is a primary school and a nursery, but no junior secondary school (JSS). Among the parents interviewed, one father had some secondary school and one had completed three years of primary school, while none of the others had ever been to school.

As in Nakore, the people of Tuasa are farmers who grow maize and yams for a living as well as raising livestock for sale. There are no local possibilities for wage earning employment. The primary school was established recently and often suffers from a lack of teachers, and there is no JSS. With one exception, none of the parents interviewed had ever been to school.

Nakore

The benefits of schooling. As was the case in the other five study sites, parents in Nakore believed in the benefits of schooling. An 80-year-old father and grandfather whose school-age children and grandchildren attend school was asked about his own schooling, and replied:

> *No I have not been to school. Is that not why I want every child of mine to go to school? I have not been to school, that is why when I was a government worker, all my juniors would come and pass me and go on to become my seniors and I*

would not be a senior. That is why when I give birth to my child, I send him to school.

Reasons children have never attended school. In spite of the belief that education is a good thing, many households interviewed in Nakore had school-age children who had never attended school.[10] The most commonly cited factors in their never having attended were the family's inability to pay for the monetary costs of schooling and the need for the child's labour in the household—factors given for both boys and girls who had never attended school. Parents generally did not provide details on the types of costs of schooling that kept them from sending children to school, but rather emphasised that because they did not have money to pay for schooling, they could not send their children.

In one household in Nakore, some of the school-age children attend school. When asked about why one son had never attended, the father was asked about this decision, and replied:

It was not decided not to put him in. It is poverty. If a child is to go to school you must get all the things he needs to go. It is because of poverty that he is not yet in school.

In another household, with five school-age children who do not attend school, the father explained, "None of these my children is in school. School matters are too much for a poor person." Asked whether a particular child will ever go to school, the father replied:

If I have the ability. See how much the school fees are these days. A poor man's child cannot complete school. That is what disturbs us. Otherwise everyone wants to go to school. You see that all of these children except one are of school-going age but if I put all of them in school, won't I be disgraced? I will never be able to pay all of their school fees. School fees are also high now. So I left them to be farming.

In another household, most of the school-age children attend school or have dropped out of school, with the exception of two girls, age 8 and 10. Asked whether his younger daughter would ever go to school, her father said, "It is a matter of ability." About his older daughter, though, he said, "She will not go to school." Asked how his older daughter felt about not attending school, the father replied:

A child does not own itself so she has not told me whether she is happy or unhappy. Well, it would be her wish to have been put in school, but it is not a free thing so that you put everybody in and when you are asked to pay for something and you don't have money, what do you do? That is why we put only some.

Of the three school-age children in one household, one boy and one girl attend. Another girl, who is 6 years old, has not attended school. Her father explained:

[10] This section focuses on children for whom reasons other than the child's perceived "readiness" to start school were given. Chapter 5 focuses on children's school readiness.

She is grown enough to begin schooling but the problem is, one doesn't want her to begin and later drop out due to lack of support. Education has a lot of benefits but it is the support that makes the villagers afraid to enrol our children.

In two households, the parents seem to have made decisions about what kind of work their children should do as both children and as adults, and are training them to do that kind of work in the context of the family's labour needs. In one of these households, the parents either send children to school or to Koranic school, or do not send children to school at all, according to this plan. The father explained, in the context of one son who farms:

I just sat down and took that decision. As a responsible father, I want to let him do the work he can do best in order to take care of me in the future. When you give birth to many children, you always look for what each one can do best and let him or her pursue it.

In another household, most of the school-age children attend. A father's 15-year-old daughter, though, has never attended school. Her father tells the story of her fostering out to a relative and of the consequences for her schooling:

At the time she was old enough to fetch water, her grandmother came for her and sent to Bamaha. I asked about school once and they said they would put her in but they did not. When she grew up a bit she ran away down to Kumasi to work and by the time she came back she was a grown woman and could not go back to school. She will get married.

In one instance, a man's alienation from the community has coloured his attitude toward schooling. This Fulani man moved to the village many years ago, but has been made to feel like a foreigner there. He explained, "When it was time for voting they took me to court that I was an alien." He continued:

Now that I am a foreigner why should I give any of my children to work for the government? That is why I have not put any of my children in school.

Asked specifically whether one of his children would ever go to school, the man replied:

She may go one day but I have not put them in. As I already told you, no matter how long a log remains in water, it can never become a crocodile. That is what they said and I became angry. One day, if my children are in school, they will say he is not paying the fees and his children are progressing so they will expel them.

Work parents expect their children to do as adults. In Nakore, there is a recognition that children who attend school have different opportunities for work than those who do not attend school, in that those who do not attend school will become farmers. Speaking of her two children who are not in school, one of the two women interviewed in Nakore said that her daughter will marry and work on the farm, and her son will be a farmer because he did not attend school at all. A man from Nakore said of his daughter, "Since she does not go to school, she will do the work that I am doing." Another man from Nakore said that if his son is unable to attend school, then he will do farm work. Speaking of another one of his sons, the same man said, "If he

learns Arabic, he'll do that along with the farming." Another man from Nakore said of his son, "Now that he is not in school, I will let him learn the Koran."

Parents' other responses to the question about what their children will become can be divided into two categories: one, that the parent just cannot know what the child will be come, or it is in God's hands; and two, if he/she does well in school, then the parent wants the child to continue in school. One man said, "If God wills it, he can look after himself." Another one remarked, "It is in God's hands. You cannot know what a child will become." A man from Nakore said simply, "I do want my children to go to school if they can." Another man stated, "If she has a mind to go far, I will encourage her."

Tuasa

The benefits of schooling. Parents in Tuasa saw many of the same benefits of schooling mentioned in the other five study sites. A father was asked about what his children would do when they were adults, and he replied:

> *Even if they do not become anything, if any gets a letter it would not have to be given to somebody else to read. If I also get a letter I can give it to them in the house to read for me. That is what was in my mind and I put them in school.*

In anther household, both the father and mother talked about the virtues of schooling. The father, who sends both of his school-age daughters to school, explained how he and his wives made the decision to send one daughter to school:

> *I sat with the mothers and I told them that because we didn't get the chance to attend school, we have to give that opportunity to our children and they agreed and I sent her.*

One of his wives added another perspective:

> *At our time, our parents didn't send us to school due to ignorance but now every child we give birth to will have to attend school. First a child who was sent to school used to be regarded as the hated child in the family and sending him to school was some kind of punishment so that he would one day be far away from the family, but today it is not so.*

One father in Tuasa, who has never attended school, was asked how far his son would go in school. He replied:

> *I can't ask him to stop school. It is like you having a dog and asking it to chase a rabbit. The dog will chase it as far as it can and if it catches it, the rabbit becomes years.*

Reasons children have never attended school. In Tuasa, as in Nakore, some school-age children have never attended school and the most commonly cited factors in their not attending were the monetary costs of schooling and the need for the child's labour.

In one household, four boys (age 6, 6, 10 and 15) and two girls (age 6 and 12) attend school, while two boys (both age 8) do not. The father explained why two of his sons had not yet attended school:

> *There will come a time when they will go. They will go. When God gives me others to help me on the farm then they too will go to school. All of them will go.*

The man's wife replied, when asked how she felt about two of her sons not being in school:

> *Well, I don't know how to say it. Well you are here and you can't afford for your children to go to school, you can't buy uniforms for them to go, you have no other means by which to look after them. That is why they are not in school.*

In another household, none of the three school-age children has attended school. According to their father, he and his wife have agreed that for the time being, the children will not attend because the family does not have sufficient resources to send them.

In one household, most of the boys and girls had attended school but later dropped out for lack of money to pay for the costs of schooling. The respondent's granddaughter, who is 5 years old, has not attended school. The grandmother said that she would not send her granddaughter to school because she would not have the money to keep her there, and her granddaughter would only drop out one day like the other children had. Asked who took this decision, the woman replied:

> *It was my poverty. Poverty, poverty said she should not attend. It was poverty, if not poverty, no one said she should not attend school because she is my direct granddaughter. I didn't discuss it with anybody, it was poverty. My husband hasn't got anything, I too, now no one helps another, poverty.*

In another household, in which most of the school-age children attend school, one 10-year-old boy has not attended school. His mother explained that "he was herding his father's cattle and then this year [his father] said he would go." This mother mentioned the fact that another son who attends school now but is over-age for the class he attends, started school late because he was taking care of his father's cattle.

In Tuasa, it was rare for a parent to say that a child would never attend school. In one household in Tuasa, a 9-year-old girl attends school, while her 12-year-old brother does not. Their father explained: "I am disabled and I am alone too. That is why I sent only one child to school." This father said he will not send his son to school, as the father needs assistance on the farm.

Work parents expect their children to do as adults. As in Nakore, parents see farming as the work their children will do if they do not attend school or do not achieve a certain level of schooling. Generally speaking, parents do not want their children to be farmers, but to have other choices. One mother said of her son, "If he is unable to attend school, then he will farm." A man from Tuasa said of his daughter, "It will depend on her own ability... but I would not want her to become a farmer."

Parents in Tuasa often expressed doubts about being able to keep their children in school. One of the mothers said of her children, "If they are not able to make it in school, then they will become farmers, but that is not our wish." It is not clear in many instances what parents mean by children making it in school—whether they refer to the family's ability to pay for the costs of schooling and to avoid having to remove the child from school to help with household work, or whether they refer to a child's performance and smooth progression from one class to another. Another mother's meaning, though, was clear, when she said of her daughter:

> *If she is able to get the money for her education, she will do the work that she wants. But if she drops out, she will marry a farmer.*

Some parents with children who had dropped out said they wished their daughter or son were still in school. One man from Tuasa said that he had never gone to school, but "At least every child of mine should be in school." Another man said, "If you fail to send your child to school, the child will regret it." One mother simply said, "I wish she would return to school."

A few parents hoped that their son or daughter might become successful and help them in the future. As a mother explained, "Well, if you send a child to school you always have the desire for him to become somebody." Another mother stated:

> *If you send a child to school, you always want some benefits to come out from it for all of you to enjoy.*

Another mother said of her son, "I would like him to become useful to me and solve my problems for me."

A number of parents made a direct connection between intelligence or school performance and success in finding work. A mother said of her daughter, "That depends on how intelligent she is and how she is able to study further." Another mother said of her son, "The work he will be doing depends on how well he performs in school." Another mother said of her daughter, "If she studies well, she will continue. If not, then she will do farming." A father said of his daughter, "The work she will do depends on her studies." Another remarked, "If she is intelligent, she can become a nurse or any other profession." Yet another father said, "If her English is correct, I will let her choose the work of her choice and I will support her."

The profession mentioned the most often for those who complete school was teaching for the boys and nursing for the girls. Only one parent hoped a child would become a doctor, and no one mentioned "government work," a category mentioned rather often in the other two districts. In addition, in Nakore and Tuasa very little mention was made of learning a trade for either boys or girls.

Wa district summary

In summary, most parents in Nakore and Tuasa wanted their children to attend school, thought that their children would succeed if they were intelligent, and were not certain that they would succeed in keeping their children in school. Most parents hoped that if their children continued in school, that they would become teachers, nurses, or whatever the child wanted to be. Those children who dropped out were expected to farm as their parents did, which was seen as the least desirable outcome for their children.

Parents in both Nakore and Tuasa seemed less confident than parents from the other two districts that their children would be able to remain in school. The lack of education among the parents, their limited financial resources, their need for labour to support the household, and the limited education facilities in the area may contribute to parents' uncertainty about being able to keep their children in school. It is important to note, however, that despite the lack of schooling among the parents, they saw schooling as important for their children. The fact that hardly anyone mentioned the possibility of their child learning a trade may be linked to the lack of any wage earning possibilities in the area.

4.3 Wenchi district study communities: Degedege and Mallamkrom

Because of the similarities between parents' views in these communities in Wenchi district, they are discussed together in this section.

The benefits of schooling. A number of parents simply stated that school is a good thing and moreover, that not sending a child to school is reprehensible. Speaking of her daughter, a mother in Degedege said, "If you don't take her to school, that is bad." Another mother said of her son, "If we don't send him to school, that is wicked." In addition, schooling was seen as the avenue to all success. As a man in Degedege remarked, "Everything you wish to do in Ghana is impossible without schooling." It is striking that these comments about the goodness and utility of schooling were made in a community where the school was rated as "not-so-good" and was the source of much political infighting.

One father in Mallamkrom explained why he wants his 5-year-old son to attend school:

> *I don't want the situation where at a point if I am not there, he wouldn't be able to take care of himself or his younger siblings. I want him to go to school and know something.*

His older son is 15 years old and attends primary 3. Asked by the interviewer why his son was behind in school, his father explained that his son had spent years in another place, working on a cocoa farm, and so he had started school late.

Reasons children have never attended school. By and large, school-age children in both Degedege and Mallamkrom attend school. Some children have dropped out (as discussed further in Chapter 6), but very few children age 5-15 have never attended school. As a consequence, there were far fewer discussions of why children had never attended school. One father in Mallamkrom had just this year sent his 6-year-old son to school, and explained why the boy had not attended nursery school before that time:

> *It was due to some little problem. You know he should have started earlier but at that time I was a little hard up so I couldn't let him start as a result of money issues and his school uniform.*

In another household in Mallamkrom, the respondent's school-age daughter was in school, but his 15-year-old nephew had never attended school. The respondent said that his nephew had come from the North to stay with him to tend animals and do farm work. Asked whether the boy would ever attend school, the respondent said, "No, he is too old now to start school." In one

household in Degedege, two children have dropped out and several children have never attended school, including a 12-year-old girl, and two boys (age 10 and 8). Their father explained: "It's because of my strength. I am not able to get the school fees."

In another household, while the younger school-age children attend school, a 15-year-old girl has never attended school. Her mother explained:

> *Right now if I should say Abena should go to school, it is not possible…You see all these children are now about to go to school, but where she was born there was no school there. These ones, they would go to school.*

Far more common in this community is a child who attends school but is not always enthusiastic to do so. Several parents complained that their children would pretend to go to school but spend time elsewhere.

Work parents expect their children to do as adults. The parents interviewed in Degedege and Mallamkrom all talked as though their children would complete schooling, which for the majority meant JSS. Since these answers were part of a conversation with someone from Accra doing a study on education, many parents may have given answers they thought were the expected ones. However, that possibility seems unlikely given that in Wa district, many parents talked about their children being out of school or doing work instead of attending school. In Wenchi there was little talk of children dropping out and as a consequence, having few opportunities other than to farm. No one in Degedege said that they expected their children to become farmers, but two women in Mallamkrom did. One mother said of her daughter, "If she does not go to school then she will suffer just like me." Another woman remarked about her son, "If he does not attend school, he may end up farming." Those two cases proved to be the exception in this district.

Quite a few parents stated that they could not know what their child wanted to become or that the children should just continue their education as far as they could. A number said that the child will choose what he/she wants to do.

Most of the other respondents mentioned a trade that the child would learn or a profession they hoped the child would enter. The trades mentioned were driving, carpentry, mechanics, dressmaking and hairdressing. The professions were teaching, nursing, medicine, government work, and police work. Several parents also mentioned banking. It is not possible to know what this sort of answer represents: a wish, a possibility, or a plan. Typical of this category is the comment of a father from Degedege who said, "The work that I would like him to do is government work," meaning a salaried, white collar job.

Now and then a parent would say that the child had declared what work he or she would do. Occasionally, parents said, "She is interested in nursing," or "she says she will be a nurse," or "he says he will become a teacher." In this district such comments were very few. Parents usually did not know or did not say what their child had in mind, suggesting that such discussions with children in primary school were rare. Perhaps more immediate an issue for parents was getting children in school and keeping them there, rather than speculating on the distant future.

Overall, parents in Wenchi district hoped their children would remain in school and that schooling would lead to a trade or a profession. In the context of being asked what their children would do as adults, they talked about school as a prelude to useful work.

4.4 Mpohor Wassa East district study communities: Wassa Mampong and Krofofrom

Because of the similarities between parents' views in these communities in Mpohor Wassa East district, they are discussed together in this section.

The benefits of schooling. Parents in this district value schooling. As a mother from Krofofrom said, "My late husband and I saw education as very important so we try to send our children to school." A man from the same community remarked, "We have to allow the children to go to school so that in the future they may have a better life." Another father said, "School is a good thing because if you don't attend, a time will come when things may become difficult." A woman in Krofofrom simply said, "I did not go to school, my children will."

Reasons children have never attended school. To an even greater extent than in Wenchi district, in Mpohor Wassa East, it is rare for school-age children not to have attended school. There are, however, children of school age who dropped out of school (see Chapter 6).

Work parents expect their children to do as adults. The comments of parents in Mpohor Wassa East district resembled closely those of Wenchi district, with a few differences. No references were made to children becoming farmers, and very few referred to any profession besides nursing. No one talked about a child becoming a doctor, a banker, or doing government work. There were the same expressions of the value of schooling, of the desire to help children continue in school, and frequent references to learning a trade. Conversations with community leaders suggested that parents were concerned about the lack of a secondary school in the area, which may be related to the lack of expectations of professional opportunities.

A few parents articulated the difference between limited schooling to learn a trade, and more advanced schooling that would widen the horizon. A mother in Krofofrom said that her husband said her daughter would learn to sew, "but now because she is good in school we would like her to continue... so she can choose the kind of job she wants." A father from Krofofrom said, "She will learn a vocation or continue to a higher level." A father from Wassa Mampong said of his daughter:

> *That depends on her schooling. If I have money, I can help her continue and send her to another school. So when she finishes there, then whatever work she wants she can do.*

Speaking about his daughter, a father from Krofofrom stated:

> *I want her to continue her education... If she wants to continue education, fine. If not, and she wants a vocation, we'll help her do that.*

Learning a trade was the most common response to what a child would do in this district. A man from Wassa Mampong said of his daughters:

Sophia says she will learn to be a seamstress, and Elizabeth says she will be a nurse, and Vida says she will do tie and dye, but today what a man can do, a woman can also do.

The trades most often mentioned were dressmaking for girls and carpentry for boys. Driving was also mentioned frequently, as was teaching. One man wanted two of his sons to become electricians. In addition, a number of parents expected their daughters to become nurses.

Wa district differs from Wenchi and Daboase districts in that there are fewer local opportunities to attend school beyond the primary grades, there are no local possibilities for wage earning, and some children have never attended school or attended Koranic school. These differences may explain in part why some parents in Wa district expected their children to become farmers, and that learning a trade was rarely mentioned. Most parents in Wa district did not mention a possible profession of their child, but those who did usually talked about teaching and nursing. In each of the other two districts, learning a trade and various professions was mentioned far more frequently.

4.5 Contrasts in fathers' and mothers' responses

Differences in mothers' and fathers' views on their children's schooling may provide insights into the way schooling is discussed within a household. It is assumed that fathers and mothers will differ in the pattern of contacts they have with teachers, with the monitoring of school performance, and in the responsibility for payment of school fees and other requirements to keep a child in school. It is also possible that mothers and fathers might differ in what they said about the future of their children.

The study found only a slight difference in the way mothers and fathers talked about the future of their children. In all three districts, both mothers and fathers talked about what their children might become upon completion of school. However, in Tuasa and Degedege the mothers' answers were less specific than were the fathers' answers. Mothers tended to say things like, "I can't tell what he will do," or "she will continue as far as she can," or "she will do the work of her heart and we will support her." Fathers in all three districts more often mentioned specific work that they expected their child to do.

Regarding the contacts with teachers, mothers clearly had less contact with teachers than fathers did. When asked about their contacts with the school, some mothers said what a mother in Nakore said, "No, it is their father who sometimes meets the teachers." In answer to the same question a mother in Mallamkrom said, "It's my husband who goes. He goes to the meetings with them (teachers). So when you come tomorrow you can ask him." A woman from Degedege responded, "I don't go there often so I don't have contacts with them." A woman in Krofofrom said, "I only heard about the teachers that they do very well with the children." The response of a woman in Tuasa shows the challenge a woman who has much work to do and has never been to school faces in keeping in touch with teachers. She said:

For a woman, by dawn you are already in the bush. What interest does she have in school? If one had been able to attend school, she could contribute for she is literate. As for me, I don't know anything worth telling.

Some mothers did, however, have contacts with the head teacher or the other teachers and could talk about the head teacher's activities. Not all fathers had contacts with the teachers either. However, fathers did not say that their spouse took care of the school contacts, as did mothers. The differences found are most likely a reflection of gender differences in contacts with an outside institution, and perhaps also that more fathers than mothers had been to school themselves.

Interviewers asked parents about the performance of their children in the last school year and how they knew about the performance. Responses of both mothers and fathers ranged from total unawareness about how well their children were doing in school to detailed knowledge about progress over time, and even occasional information about the standing of the school in recent exams. Some mothers who had never been to school said the father or someone else would know better. A mother in Wassa Mampong said about her son in primary 5:

> *As for his performance I cannot tell you anything because when he brings his exam report, it is his father who takes a look. I have never been to school so he doesn't show it to me.*

Another mother in Wassa Mampong said, "They bring the papers so when we look through, we know. I do not know but I give it to somebody to look through." A woman from Tuasa said of her daughter's performance:

> *I don't know because I can't read. But she attends school regularly...I always see her read but because I am illiterate I don't know how she reads. But her colleagues say she is good.*

Many mothers, on the other hand, were well informed about their child's performance. A mother in Degedege said of her son, "The teachers said he was good, they say he is brilliant." The same mother said of her daughter:

> *When she was in primary three the teacher made me aware that she does well and that if I could, I should take her from here and send her somewhere. But to be frank, in primary four the teacher she had, whenever she returned from school and I looked through her books, I got sad. He does not teach her...*

In many instances, the way parents follow the performance of their children in school seems to be related to their own education. A number of parents who had never attended school managed to follow their children's performance as closely as they were able to, including looking though their exercise books to see how many corrections there were—even if the parent could not read. As one father in Tuasa, who has never attended school, explained:

> *When she returns from school, I look at her book. Those that are good, the teacher marks them correct and those that are wrong, he crosses them out. When I compare this year's correct marks with last year's, I see that this year's correct marks are more than last year's.*

Another father in Tuasa who has never been to school replied, when asked about the performance of his son: "When he comes back from school, he writes things. At times he even

writes about me. He writes my name and comes and shows it to me." Another father in Tuasa said of his son and their interaction:

> *His performance? He said he was only beaten by two or three pupils in their tests. When I sit here and watch them, any time they return from school in the afternoon or anytime they are always concentrated on their books. I sit down and watch the way he writes and it shows he is very serious.*

Parents who have attended school and are literate have more options. A father in Krofofrom who had completed form 4 of his daughter, "I look at her report cards and I also ask her teachers how she does in school." Since one can find the same range of responses among both mothers and fathers according to educational attainment, no consistent pattern of difference emerges in comparing the awareness of their children's performance in school.

Interviewers asked parents about school fees paid in the last year and about any other purchases that had been made. Except for some parents in Mallamkrom, mothers and fathers talked about paying school fees, printing fees, book bags, and school uniforms, as well as books and other supplies. The husband is usually responsible for school payments and purchases. A few mothers said they were unable to pay school fees because their husband had left. Some mothers, when asked about the fees paid for a child, said they did not know, as only the father would know because he pays. This pattern of male responsibility for payment of school expenses was found in all three districts.

4.6 Differences in expectations for girls' and boys' futures

It might be expected there would be differences in parents' views about girls' and boys' futures in three respects: 1) the relative importance of schooling for girls and for boys; 2) how long girls and boys should remain in school; 3) the specific work parents expect children will do when they are adults. The first two aspects are closely related and reflect the importance given to schooling, while the third relates directly to gendered roles in society. Each of these aspects deserves a short discussion.

The discussion about schooling was so universally positive that no differences in the responses for boys and girls can be discerned. All parents seemed to agree—with the exception of a farmer or two in Wa district—that children belong in school. There was no evidence of a preference for boys or girls. Parents agreed that schooling holds promise for all. However, it is not clear to what extent this principle is followed in practice. Such a question would need to be approached through a large sample survey, but could be easily done.

The second aspect—relating to the length of time children should spend in school or the level they should attain before leaving school—is less clear but not very different. For both boys and girls it was often said, "well, she'll go as far as she can." In all the research sites an important number of mothers and fathers said that their child would go as far in school as his/her intelligence would permit. Thus on the level of declared intention, the outlook for boys and for girls appears the same, with family support promised for both. But the mystery lies in the phrase "as far as he/she can," for that possibility is situated within a vulnerable and fragile family that wants to support children but cannot always do so. The question, addressed in Chapter 6, is whether girls are more vulnerable to dropping out of school in response to family needs for

labour or the shortage of funds to pay for the costs of schooling. In the context of future work and the timing of leaving school, a girl getting married was rarely mentioned as her future work.

It is in the realm of actual work envisioned that gender roles become most clear in this study. Girls who learn a trade are expected to become seamstresses and hairdressers, while boys will become carpenters, drivers, and electricians. The principal profession mentioned for girls was nursing, though a small number expected to become teachers. A small number of parents said their daughter would enter the army or become a policewoman. Government work was not mentioned as a likely possibility for girls, though a few said their daughter would become a doctor. Parents who hoped or expected their son to become a professional talked about government work, teaching, medicine, or banking.

4.7 Conclusion

The parents interviewed have long understood that schooling for children should be considered as good, a practice that holds the promise of a better future for their children. A number of parents, particularly in Wa district, said they wanted their children to be in school because otherwise as adults they would have to farm. Some portion of that articulation of support may derive from the interview situation where an educated representative of the government or the university asks a farmer about what he/she thinks of the education of his/her children. No one said that girls need not attend school, which suggests that efforts to encourage parents to send girls to school had at least been understood. Nor did the study find any difference in the expressions of family support for girls and boys to attend school.

In reading through the interviews, the reader is struck by three aspects that appear in both the tone and content of the dialogues. One, that parents fervently believe that both boys and girls should ideally be in school. Two, that a large proportion of parents seems unsure about being able to keep their children in school because they cannot afford the expenses, because they need the child's assistance with work, or because there is no secondary school nearby. And three, most of these families are socially and economically fragile and vulnerable. That is, a small change in the family circumstance—someone gets sick or dies, someone has to move away, a crop fails, a mother is suddenly on her own—can remove a child from school temporarily or permanently. Most likely, the social and economic uncertainty of life in these districts has prevented attendance from moving beyond the plateau it reached some years ago.

SCHOOL READINESS 5

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this report, in spite of various efforts to increase enrolment rates, Ghana's primary school gross enrolment ratio (76 in the year 2000) has not seen a meaningful increase in more than a decade. In this context, it is critical to gather information that can be used to inform interventions aimed at increasing rates of school attendance. An important part of increasing school attendance involves understanding how parents decide that a child is ready to attend school for the first time.

This chapter considers evidence on how parents make decisions about when to send a child to primary school for the first time. This process is generally seen as the outcome of parents' determining, in each child's case, when he/she is "ready" to start attending school.

The concept of school readiness is key to understanding the factors related to the initiation of school attendance. The study asks the question, "What do parents pay attention to in deciding that a child should attend school for the first time?" This question is critical in considering how to raise the rates of first-time primary 1 attendance at the intended or target age of 6. One might expect that to parents, estimated age, or size, or maturity matter the most, but that is far from certain. Only by understanding what matters to parents can useful interventions be designed to increase timely first-time primary school attendance.

Although 6 is the official target age for starting primary school in Ghana, this study found that many parents expressed uncertainty about their children's ages; some explicitly stated that they do not normally keep track of children's ages or dates of birth. Yet, regardless of a general lack of age awareness, the majority of respondents conveyed a clear sense that they knew what readiness meant to them. In the words of one mother in Wassa Mampong:

> *I didn't take note of her age when she started school, but when she was ready, we sent her.*

This chapter explores what readiness means to this mother and the other parents who participated in this study. The remainder of the chapter is divided into eight sections with the first section clarifying several key terms and concepts related to school readiness. The next section discusses how the readiness question was framed when it was posed to parents in this study and how parents responded to the question in turn. The next five sections present the study's findings about school readiness including: a detailing of the various factors parents identified as relevant to their decisions about school readiness, an analysis of how parents in the study understood the notion of school readiness, and a discussion of how that understanding was operationalised differently across communities and within households. The final section draws conclusions from the evidence.

5.2 Defining "school" and the difference between enrolment and attendance

The "school" in "school readiness"

Before turning to a discussion of how parents understood school readiness and the factors contributing to their decisions about when to send children to school, it makes sense to consider what parents understood "school" to mean when they were asked the readiness question. This study was conducted in six distinct communities located within three sampled districts in Ghana. Since the school facilities available in each community vary, parents' decisions about when a child is ready to attend school for the first time may or may not have involved the option of sending the child to pre-school (nursery school or kindergarten). Five of the six communities in this study had a nursery school, a kindergarten, or both. In those communities, for children who attend or attended pre-school, some parents referred to the time they sent the child to pre-school rather than the time they sent the child to primary school.

Other parents talked about readiness for both pre-school and primary school, making a distinction between the levels of schooling. While many parents referred to the knowledge and skill base that is acquired in pre-school as an important step towards readiness for primary school, other parents focused on pre-school as a means to develop a child's long-term interest in schooling. These parents spoke about the problem of truancy among primary school pupils and stressed the importance of sending children to pre-school so they get used to school and do not refuse to go when they are older. As one Tuasa father simply put it, "If [a child] starts as an infant, by the time he is older his heart will be used to school."

In some communities, the terms "nursery" and "kindergarten" were used interchangeably, while in other communities a distinction was made between the two. For example, in Wassa Mampong, some parents said their children had attended nursery school before kindergarten. A few parents stated that a child should attend nursery first, then move to kindergarten at age 4 for two years (K1 and K2) and from there move into the first class of primary school (primary 1).

It should also be noted that while some parents made a distinction between a child's readiness for pre-school and readiness for primary 1, others did not. In most cases, however, the respondent made clear the level of schooling referred to in his/her response. This distinction is highlighted in our analysis of the data, whenever relevant.

Enrolment versus attendance

Since this study focused on the question of whether children are sent to—or attend—school at all, this chapter is therefore concerned with how parents decide when a child is ready to attend school, whether or not the child is officially enrolled.

Parents in this study often made a distinction between sending a child to school and officially enrolling him. In other words, some parents considered a child "ready" to be sent to school but not yet "ready" to be registered officially on the class roster. Such children are usually sent to either kindergarten or primary school along with an older sibling or neighbour and enrolled once the teacher determines they are ready to formally join the class.

A father of a two-year-old boy said his son accompanies his older sister to kindergarten but the school authorities have not yet "put him in." A mother said that her husband sent their 7-year-old son to primary this year but they have "not yet written his name." One father who sent his daughter to school before she was old enough for primary 1 said, "She was still very young and I used to send her to go and sit at the school and mingle with her colleagues." Another father explained simply that his daughter "followed her friends until she was grown enough." These parents understand school readiness as a process, comprised of various stages of readiness. A 4-year-old child may be judged ready to go to primary school because he has an older sister to look after him while he is there. The same child is not yet considered ready for primary 1, but he will be when the teacher determines he is ready to learn and become a member of the class.

5.3 The question of school readiness

Of the several research questions this study sought to answer, the question relating specifically to the issue of school readiness is: How do parents decide when a child is "ready" to start school?

For each child in the household age 5-15, parents were asked a question about school readiness in relation to that child. The question was asked about each child specifically rather than about children in general. The question took one of two forms depending on the schooling status of the child. If a child had attended school in the past or was currently attending, the parent was asked, "How did you know when (name of child) was ready to start school?" If a child had never before attended school, the parent was asked, "How will you know when (name of child) will be ready to start school?" The latter form of the question was asked less frequently since most of the children had either been to school at some point or were currently attending.

It is worth noting that regardless of which version of the question they were asked, some parents responded to the question of school readiness with general statements instead of specifics. In other words, some responses were about how to tell a child is ready for school in general instead of how a parent determined a particular child's school readiness.

In addition, some parents' first response to the question of school readiness was not related directly to the question asked by the interviewer. These parents seemed to understand the question, "How did you know (name of child) was ready to start schooling?" as, "Why did you decide to send (name of child) to school?" Responses varied, but usually touched on the importance of schooling in general and emphasized the parent's intention to send all of his/her children to school. These responses will not be discussed in detail in this chapter, as they are covered in Chapter 4. However, such statements emphasize that, for many parents, the question they are faced with is not whether to send a child to school, but rather when.

5.4 Overview of school readiness factors

There was a great deal of variation in the factors parents considered relevant when making decisions about their children's school readiness (see Table 5.1). While some respondents pointed to a single factor to explain how they determined a particular child's readiness, parents often referred to more than one factor. Responses varied considerably across as well as within households, comprising a complex web of concepts parents associated with school readiness. Below, these concepts are grouped into two overarching categories.

First, parents often referred to child-specific characteristics as the main indicator that a child was ready to begin schooling. This type of response focused on factors such as a child's size, cognitive ability, or demonstrated interest in attending. Second, characteristics and circumstances at the household level were discussed as important determinants of a child's school readiness. In this category, parents discussed factors such as the household's ability to cover the costs of schooling, the consequences of a family member's death, or the need for a child's labour to help support the household.

Parents in this study seem to understand the concept of school readiness as a combination of child readiness and household readiness. Individual child characteristics may be such that a child is considered ready to begin school, but unless the household is also ready, the conditions for school readiness may not be satisfied. Although it is important to distinguish between child-level and household-level factors, the categories themselves should not be seen in an hierarchical relationship. Rather, the categories are established in order to define and describe the multitude of different factors described by the respondents as relevant to their decisions about school readiness.

5.5 Key child-level factors

The interviews revealed that most parents had some idea of what a child would experience in school and were attuned to whether a particular child was capable of performing in a school setting. Those signals, or indicators, that emerged most commonly in parents' discussions of school readiness were that of speech, cognitive development, emotional maturity and self-awareness. These factors are significant because they represent an important threshold a child was expected to reach before he/she was considered to be capable of participating in the learning process. Since speech, cognitive development, emotional maturity and self-awareness develop at different rates for every child, some children were able to cross the threshold of readiness earlier than others.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, another child-level factor, stature, was mentioned by many parents. In contrast to speech, cognitive development, emotional maturity and self-awareness, when parents spoke about a child's physical stature they did not directly relate it to a child's maturity and learning capability. Instead, when a child was of similar size or height as school-going children, parents said they "saw" the child was ready to attend. In this way, stature seemed to be understood by some parents as a symbol of a child's school readiness, rather than a signal of a child's readiness to learn.

Speech

Many parents referred to a child's ability to speak when asked how they knew their child was ready for school. Some parents considered the ability of a child to "talk well" as the key indicator of readiness. A few parents said they had delayed their children's schooling because they were late to speak. In such cases, parents were not always specific about what it means to speak—whether it is the ability to say something at all, properly pronounce words, or formulate complete sentences. However, some parents said that the clarity of a child's speech or the ability to engage in conversation and be understood was a key factor. Still other parents discussed speech in relation to the child's cognitive ability. One mother said that her 4-year old son would be ready for school, "when he can speak and answer questions." In another case, a father said of

his 8-year old daughter, "When she could speak with her colleagues, I knew that she could learn in school."

Table 5.1. Factors in determining a child's readiness to start attending school

Factor	Boys (N=149)	Girls (N=136)	Total (N=285)
Child-level factors			
Speech	39	31	70
Cognitive development	31	19	50
Emotional maturity and self-awareness	16	15	31
Stature	14	13	27
Age or time of birth	5	5	10
Demonstrated interest in attending school	15	9	24
Health and disabilities issues resolved	6	7	13
Stamina or ability to walk the distance or endure the school day	11	5	16
Influence of school authorities	14	19	33
Household-level factors			
Financial resources	19	24	43
Labour	22	26	48
Followed siblings to school	15	12	27
Family composition	11	13	24

Notes: School might mean either preschool or primary school, according to parents' decision-making processes. For some children, more than one factor was said to have contributed to determining a child's readiness. Information was collected for a total of 285 children (149 boys and 136 girls) age 4-15.

Cognitive development

Many parents said they decided a child was ready for school when he/she began to demonstrate an ability to learn. When asked how she decided her son was ready to go to school, one mother in Mallamkrom said she could see that "his mind was starting to mature." While some parents said they knew a child was ready when they saw he/she was "knowledgeable" or "intelligent," other parents were more specific. A few parents referred, for example, to the time a child began to count or recite the alphabet. Other parents said they knew it was time to send the child when he/she showed the ability to recognize places and objects. As one father in Nakore said, it is time to send a child to school when "he knows one thing from the other." Another father in Nakore said he was about to send his son to nursery school because now he is able to remember what he has been told. He explained, "If you teach him something today and ask him about it tomorrow, he can remember it." Several parents told their interviewers that when a child is able to remember to run an errand and is able to do so successfully, he/she is ready for school. One set of parents in Mallamkrom said they considered the ability to reason a factor in determining the school readiness of their son and daughter.

Emotional maturity and self-awareness

A number of parents discussed a child's level of maturity as a basic condition of sending him/her to school. Parents made a distinction between the level of maturity required for pre-school and for primary. For pre-school, two mothers said they waited until their children were able to play independently before leaving them with the nursery school teacher. In addition, several parents mentioned toilet training as a consideration when deciding whether a child was

ready to go to pre-school. One father in Degedege said that he waited until his twin daughters were able to ask an adult if they could use the toilet before he sent them to kindergarten.

For the primary level, several parents expressed concerns about sending a child who is too immature, perhaps because it was seen as a waste of resources. One father in Nakore said his daughter is doing fine in nursery school, but, "at this stage she doesn't yet know what she is about and if you send her to school, she won't know why she is there." A mother in Mallamkrom seemed to think a certain degree of maturity was needed for a child to do well in primary school. She said, "If a child matures a little before going to school it helps him study." Another parent, a father in Tuasa, decided to delay his son's schooling because he "used to behave foolishly and I wanted him to change before he could go." Another father in Nakore mentioned that if a child is sent to school when he is too young, he will not take proper care of his schoolbooks.

Stature

Interviews with parents suggest that a child's size, especially height, factors heavily in determining when some children are ready for school. A number of parents said they knew a child was ready when he/she was "grown." Some parents shared stories about children who were either big or small for their age and explained how it affected the child's school readiness. One boy in Krofofrom was sent to school early because he was big for his age. His father said that instead of starting off in nursery school, he was able to start directly in primary 1. In a similar case, a mother in Wassa Mampong felt pressured to send her 2-year old son to school because he grew quickly and was very tall for his age. She explained that strangers thought he was already over-age for school when they saw him and she felt obliged to do something. She pleaded with the nursery school teacher who finally agreed to accept him. One mother in Degedege said when she sent her son to school around age 6, he had to go to kindergarten first because he was small for his age. The boy stayed in pre-school for three years because he was considered too small to be promoted to primary 1.

The study also found that parents sometimes use height as a proxy for age when deciding whether a child is ready to go to school. Several parents said they compared their son or daughter's height to that of other children. One father in Tuasa said that he knew it was time to send his son to school when he noticed the boy was taller than some of the other children going to school at that time. Interestingly, a father in Degedege with twin daughters sent one of the children to kindergarten before her twin sister. In this case, a parent was aware that the children were exactly the same age, but still chose to separate the girls so that they would be the same size as the other children in their classes.

The interviews also suggest that children whose growth is stunted due to a childhood illness or malnutrition may be less likely to be considered ready for school on time than children with a normal or faster growth rate. A man in Degedege explained that his 9-year old son is still in primary 1 because his mother died when he was a newborn and his growth was severely stunted. The boy's father said that he is still smaller than his 6-year old brother. Because of his small size, he has been forced to repeat several times and remains in primary 1.

5.6 Other child-level factors

Several additional factors played a role in some parents' decisions about a child's school readiness but these factors were less prominent than those discussed in the previous section.

Age

Age was discussed less frequently by the respondents in this study than most of the other child-level factors. An exception is in the community of Degedege, where a number of parents referred to age 4 as the time to send a child to nursery school. Overall, while many parents said they sent a child to school when he/she was "old enough" or "grown," very few said they decided a child was ready because of age or because the child had just turned 6.

Parents usually indicated that they had relied on a measure other than age to determine if their child was of school-going age. One father in Degedege said he knew his son was ready to start school because he noticed that other children born around the same time as his son were starting to attend. In another case, a father in Nakore determined that his daughter was not yet ready for school because the local school had considered her older brother too young to enrol the previous year.

Among parents who spoke specifically about the age a child should be in order to start school, many expressed uncertainty about the exact ages of their children. In most cases a reference to age demonstrated more of an awareness of the target ages for schooling than it did an awareness of age for the child in question. For instance, one father in Mallamkrom told the interviewer that when a child turns 4 or 5, it is time to send him to school. Though he clearly expressed an understanding that a child should be sent to school by a certain age, he later revealed that it was a teacher, and not he himself, who knew when his son had reached that age.

Demonstrated interest

Parents in all six communities in this study expressed concerns about truancy, especially at the primary level. Some respondents had a child who had lost or was losing interest in schooling and, as discussed in section 5.2, these parents sometimes discussed the importance of sending children to school at a young age as a solution. Awareness of the issue of truancy might help explain why some parents interviewed considered a demonstrated interest in schooling to be an important factor in their determination of a child's readiness for school. One mother in Degedege stressed that a child must show some interest in schooling before he/she is sent. A father in Mallamkrom said that his daughter is ahead of his son in school even though they are the same age. It was the girl's greater interest in going that led the father to send her to school first.

Several parents who talked about a child's interest in schooling said they knew the child was interested in school when he/she started following an older sibling to school. Others referred to the time when a child noticed his friends going to school and asked or begged his/her parents to send him/her as well. One Degedege mother said that two of her sons had shown a strong interest in going to school once their friends were going. With one son, who is now in primary 4, she let him go to school for a trial run so she could be certain he was really serious before registering him.

Health and disabilities

Some of the parents interviewed said that a child's school readiness had been delayed for health reasons. In one case in Nakore, an 8-year old child's slow mental development hinders his ability to learn, so his father has not yet sent him to school. In Degedege another 8-year old boy got a late start in school because, according to his mother, he was slow to walk and the teachers told her he was too young to start. Several children mentioned during the interviews suffered from long-term childhood illnesses that kept their parents from sending them to school until they were healthy. Two children are deaf and their parents said they believe they are ready for school but the local schools cannot accommodate them.

Stamina

Although each of the six communities in this study is equipped with one primary school, a few of the households interviewed were in neighbouring villages some distance from the school. These parents usually mentioned the long distance from their village to the pre-school and primary school as an important factor in determining a child's readiness. According to one father in Krofofrom, schooling was delayed for all of his children because they live over three miles from the nearest school. He said his 4-year-old daughter would have to start nursery late because she is still too weak to walk that far. His other children, age 6-9, all attend school but had to wait until they were strong enough and had the stamina to walk the distance before they started. The father explained that when he saw that a child "had strong enough legs," he decided that he/she was ready for nursery. In Wenchi district, several households faced the same issue. One mother in a village outside of Mallamkrom said she delayed sending both her sons to school because the distance was too far for young children to manage.

Influence of school authorities

In a number of cases, parents did not make determinations about a child's school readiness, but rather acquiesced to the local school authorities who told them a child was ready to start attending. In each community, some parents and community informants reported that school authorities were involved in letting parents know when their children were ready for school. In some cases, a parent's decision that a child was ready to start attending school was prompted by a home visit from the teacher or another school authority. According to one father in Nakore, his son was able to start school earlier than expected because the head teacher saw him following his older brother to the school and came to tell the father to enrol him.

Other parents decided on their own that a child was ready for school and then took the child to school to check with the authorities. One father in Nakore said he took his son and his older daughter to the school together. The teachers accepted his daughter but when they told him his son was still too young, the man insisted until they let him register both of his children. Another father was not as successful. When he decided his son was ready for school the teachers said the boy was still not old enough and made him wait another year.

5.7 Household-level factors

In the six communities studied, the decision of when to send a child to school for the first time cannot be separated from the household circumstances. Parents' responses show that school

readiness depends not only on whether a child is "ready" but also on whether a household is "ready."

Many of the parents interviewed spoke about the financial instability of the household, revealing that the ebb and flow of resources affected the timing of many children's entry into school. When discussing the timing of sending each of their children to school for the first time, parents talked about the household's need to shift priorities based on one or more unexpected life circumstance such as a family member's long-term illness, death, or the divorce of a child's parents. In their struggle to manage the household's fragile condition, parents often made determinations about school readiness based on a child's place in the birth order and ability to contribute labour in support of the family.

Financial Resources

Not surprisingly, many parents delayed sending children to school for lack of financial resources. Three mothers, each with a 4-year old daughter, said they were aware that their children were ready to start pre-school but there was not enough money to send them that year. A mother in Tuasa said simply, "When we are ready and have the ability, we will let her go." In a household in Nakore, the father of eleven children said he had to wait for some of his children to complete school or drop out before he could afford to send others.

Such statements suggest that parents understand school readiness as a combination of the child's individual readiness and the household's ability to send the child. Other parents said that specific school expenses, such as various fees or the cost of a required uniform, table or chair, prevented them from sending a child who was otherwise ready. In one case, the father of a 5-year-old boy in Krofofrom was not yet able to send him because the kindergarten teacher said the father needed to buy a chair for the boy first. In Tuasa, a 7-year-old girl could not attend school because her father could not afford to buy her the required uniform.

Labour

A number of parents interviewed for this study said the need for a child's labour in support of the household had either delayed or was delaying a child's entry into school. In several households, parents said a child had started school late because he/she had formerly been fostered out to another relative who had kept the child home to help with household chores. A mother in Tuasa said she and her husband had kept their 15-year-old son out of school when he was younger because they needed him to mind the family's cattle. Once his younger brother, now 10, was old enough to take over, the older son was able to begin school. The 10-year-old son has not yet been able to start school because the youngest son, age 6, has not yet taken over the herding. In another household in Tuasa, a couple's 12-year old daughter had a late start in school because she had to look after her younger siblings until they were able to start nursery. In this girl's case, school readiness depended not only on her own readiness for school, but also on that of her younger siblings.

Parents often expressed a desire to send all of their children to school eventually. Referring to those of his children who had not yet started school, a father in Tuasa said, "When God gives me others to help me on the farm, then they too will go to school." In most of the families that reported delaying a child's schooling because his/her labour was needed to support the household, at least some of the children in the household were currently attending school.

In only a few cases had none of the children ever attended. In Nakore, two parents said they had no plan to send their sons, who did farm work, to school. In Mallamkrom, one father said he could never send his 10-year old daughter to school because she needs to take care of her younger siblings. In such cases, the notion of school readiness is a non-issue since the parents have already decided that the child will not attend school.

The study also found that household labour needs did not always have a negative impact on a child's chances of being sent to school. A number of parents talked about the time when a child was too heavy to carry along to the farm as the time they decided to send the child to pre-school. One of these parents, a mother in Mallamkrom, said she sent her child to nursery school as soon as she was weaned. Another mother, citing the childcare benefits of schooling, said that sending her 4-year old daughter to the nursery frees her go to the farm.

Siblings

Parents sometimes described a child's school readiness in relation to the readiness of the child's other siblings. In some cases, a parent did not consider a child ready for school because of his/her place in the birth order. For instance, several parents said that a young child had to wait for his/her older siblings to go to primary before going. Other interviews revealed that older children are sometimes held back from school because their younger siblings are not yet considered ready. In one case in Degedege, a mother explained that she sent her daughter to kindergarten on schedule at age 4. When the girl started to go to school and her younger brother followed, the teachers sent the boy away because he was too young. The parents then decided to keep the girl at home until her brother was also ready. In a number of cases, the presence of other siblings made it possible for more of the children to be considered ready for school. One father in Krofofrom said that he was able to send one of his daughters to start school early because of her older sister who could accompany her to and from school.

Family composition

A number of parents mentioned that a change in the family's composition had impacted their decisions about when to send a child to school. In such cases, a child's schooling was usually delayed due to the separation, divorce, or absence of parents. In one case, a father in Mallamkrom said his 10-year old son started school late because he was living with his mother who did not send him to school. When the child came to live with his father, he finally started school. One mother in Wassa Mampong explained that her daughter had to start school late, at about age 8, because she divorced the girl's father and was struggling financially when it was time for the child to begin. A father in Krofofrom admitted that two of his children had been delayed in starting school because of his need to travel at the time they were ready to begin. They were both able to start school when the man returned to the household.

The death of a parent or other relative was also discussed as a factor in determining a child's school readiness. In Mallamkrom, one mother said her 6-year old daughter's schooling has been put on hold because of the death of her father. For the moment, she said, her daughter's help is needed at home so she cannot be sent to school as planned. In several other cases, children started school over-age because the death of a parent kept them from starting school on schedule. For some children, the death of a parent resulted in their never attending school. A 13-year old girl, whose father died when she was younger, has never been sent to school.

According to her foster mother, when the girl came to live with her in Mallamkrom, she was already older than most other school children and refused to attend.

5.8 Differences in readiness

One often finds contrasts in the perspectives of respondents by community or by sex. In this study, differences in the way parents spoke about school readiness across communities were minimal. In all six communities, parents' discussions about how they decided a child was ready to start school included both child-level and household-level factors; no distinguishable patterns emerged in terms of the frequency of individual factors mentioned in any one community. For instance, parents in each community spoke about a child's cognitive development as a key factor in determining a child's readiness to learn in school. Across the six study sites, parents discussed the need for children's labour within the household as a factor in determining readiness.

There were also no clear gender differences in parents' estimation of when their sons and daughters were ready to start attending school. At the child level, none of the parents indicated that girls and boys mature at different rates and only one parent said that girls' intellectual development differs from that of boys. At the household level, parents mentioned the need to rely on girls' and boys' labour just as frequently, and no systematic gender differences were found in the impact of death, divorce, illness or birth order on school readiness.

5.9 Conclusion

Parents' assessment of readiness is a fluid process, situated in the family circumstances. As the social and economic fortunes of the household shift with outside pressures and internal dynamics, so do the opportunities for a child to start attending school. These opportunities usually are specific to each child in the household.

In the households studied, parents do not see school readiness as a point reached at some moment in time. Children are not considered ready for school solely because they have reached their sixth birthday, mastered the alphabet, or shown an interest in going to school with their siblings. While parents pointed to many distinct factors, these factors seldom were the sole determinants of a child's school readiness. Instead, readiness seems to be understood more as a process—one that involves a child's development as well as the ebb and flow of household circumstances.

DROPOUT 6

6.1 Introduction

This study of the household demand for schooling inquired into how children who have dropped out of school spend their time, the circumstances at home and school when the child left school, and how the child reacted to dropping out of school. In addition, information was collected on the last class the child attended and on the age at which he/she dropped out. Information was collected from parents, from selected children, and from school staff and community informants.

Dropout—particularly in primary school—is a key education issue since children who complete only a few years of school may not reap many of the benefits of primary schooling, including literacy and numeracy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, dropout during the primary school classes in substantial Ghana: according to MOE data from 2000, 20 percent of the male and 30 percent of the female pupils who started primary school dropped out before completing the level.

This chapter first defines key terms related to dropout, then discusses the familial context in which schooling decisions are made, the circumstances in children's lives when they dropped out of school, and who makes decisions about dropout. Finally, the chapter discusses children's working lives after they drop out of school, and summarises the study's major findings on dropout.

6.2 Defining absenteeism and dropout

At this point in the discussion, it is useful to define a couple of terms. Absenteeism refers to a pupil missing school for as little as a day or as long as a couple of months, and then returning to school. Absenteeism that is tied to events that recur across the years, such as planting or harvesting time, is called seasonal absenteeism. In many countries, it is common for pupils to miss a considerable amount of school each year in order to do seasonal work, and then to return to school. It is expected that a pupil who is absent over a long period of time is more likely than other pupils to drop out of school. Dropout typically refers to a pupil's permanent withdrawal from school.

In education, there are limited data available on the extent to which school dropouts later return to school, or drop back into school. Between information collected by Ministries of Education and household surveys, rates of school enrolment/attendance, dropout, and repetition can be calculated. However, information is not commonly collected about rates at which children who have dropped out later return to school.

Generally speaking, it is believed that pupils who drop out of school are unlikely to return to school and that dropping back into school is a relatively rare event. This position is based on the theory that children and youth who leave school soon take on a new and more extensive role in their family's support, and/or marry and start families of their own. Once children and youth have taken on new roles, it is less likely that they will return to school. An exception to this

pattern is the very young child who is sent to school only briefly before deciding he/she does not like it, or is withdrawn by parents or sent home by teachers because he/she is considered to be not yet ready for school. It is expected that a year or two later, such a child would likely return to school more mature and better prepared for schooling.

Absenteeism leading to dropout

Pupils who are absent from school long term, seasonally, or frequently are expected to be more likely to drop out of school than pupils attending regularly. A head teacher in Nakore sees a relationship between seasonal absenteeism and dropout: At the peak of the farming season, many parents in the village remove their children from school to work on the farm or to take care of younger siblings while their parents work; many of these children drop out of school eventually.

In a couple of instances, frequent or extended absenteeism preceded a pupil's dropping out of school, or is expected to do so. In Nakore, a man explained how his brother, who is 15 years old, gradually stopped attending primary 2 and ultimately dropped out:

> *He started adding Fridays to his weekends and continued like that until he finally stopped.*

In Tuasa, a woman's 15-year-old son attends primary 6, but often misses school because he would rather farm. His mother was asked whether she thought her son would continue in school or leave school, and she replied:

> *He is leaving by himself. Someone who goes to school one day and the next day [goes] to farm, is someone who is pulling [himself] out. He is falling out.*

Interrupted schooling: When dropout is not the end of schooling

For a number of children, their schooling was interrupted for a period of months or even years. Several children in the six school communities studied dropped out of school in response to an illness in the family, and to the shifting demands made on family members because of the illness. According to a mother in Degedege, her five children (ranging in age from 10 to 19) dropped out of school to help the family when their father got sick. A few months later, when their father had recovered, four of the five children returned to school. Similarly, in Mallamkrom, a boy (age unknown) dropped out of school for two years because his father was sick and the family had to move to another village. The boy has since returned to school.

Other children's schooling was interrupted when they moved from one household to another, or when a different person began making decisions about their schooling. A 13-year-old girl staying with her grandfather in Degedege started primary 1 at age 6. The following year, she went to stay with her parents in another village. There, she was not sent to school. After a few years, the girl returned to her grandfather's house and resumed schooling; she is now in primary 4. In another case, according to a father in Krofofrom, his 10-year-old daughter started school at age 7. Soon thereafter, while the father was away from the household, his wife withdrew their daughter from school. When he returned, the father sent his daughter back to school; she now attends primary 2.

In two households, children dropped out of school—and later returned to school—by choice. In Wassa Mampong, a 15-year-old girl who attends primary 6 (but has repeated several classes of school) has dropped out of school on multiple occasions, but each time has been persuaded by her parents to return. According to a father in Krofofrom, his 10-year-old daughter started primary 1 at age 5, but dropped out of school for 2 years because "she just didn't want to go." Later, she changed her mind because "she realised that all her friends were going to school and I was not minding her." On her return to school, the girl started over at primary 1.

Other children dropped out of school when the household could not afford the monetary costs of schooling, then returned when the costs could be paid. According to a father in Mallamkrom, his 15-year-old daughter dropped out of primary 2 at the age of 11 because the family was unable to buy her a table and chair for school. She later returned to school, reaching primary 4 before dropping out of school again. Her father says that his daughter wants to return to school again, "but I don't have any money." In the same household, another daughter, who is 10 years old, dropped out of primary 1 to take care of her younger sister. According to her father, the girl returned to school a week before the household was interviewed. The father of a boy in Nakore explained that his son (age unknown) dropped out of school after primary 1 and later returned to primary 2. The father explained:

> *Sometimes the things you need to buy for schooling are so much you cannot afford it, so you wait until you have the ability before you send the child to school.*

The longest period given for dropping out of school before returning was for a 10-year-old girl in Mallamkrom. Her mother said that after her daughter went to nursery school, she stayed out of school for 6 or 7 years before going to primary 1.

These findings suggest that it should not be assumed that dropout is a final event in a child's schooling. A child may drop out of school and return to school months or even years later, and indeed, may drop out of school on multiple occasions throughout his/her schooling life.

6.3 The familial context of schooling decisions, including dropout

As subsequent sections of this chapter illustrate, there is considerable variation in how the decision to drop out is made, including who makes the final decision. In some cases, parents determine that a child should leave school. In other instances, children refuse to continue to go to school, sometimes in spite of pressure from parents, teachers, and occasionally even from the police.

These decisions, along with decisions about how other household members spend their time, are embedded in the context of family circumstances and needs. Most families in these six school communities work together to subsist, and must divide the household responsibilities for domestic and productive tasks among them, in addition to trying to plan for children's future lives by sending them to school, to alternative vocational training, or not sending them to school at all. Both children attending school and those not in school do a significant amount of work in support of the household. A typical schoolgirl gets up, sweeps the compound, and fetches water, washes dishes, and bathes her younger siblings before going to school. After school, she comes home, fetches water again and helps cook dinner. On weekends, she helps at the farm. Boys who attend school often have a shorter or different list of chores to do, but not always.

There are trade-offs in the use of resources, such as whether to spend money on health or education needs, or to buy food or other goods needed by the family. In addition, factors such as the illness or death of a key supporting family member, family migration, or the fostering out of a child to another household, may have consequences on children's school participation.

How these factors affect each child's schooling in a given family depends on the perceived needs and the strategies available for meeting those needs. For instance, a mother from Mallamkrom explained how she coped with her work demands and the illness of her young child by withdrawing her older daughter from school to assist her in a crisis:

> *You look at this my daughter; she was seriously sick so when I went to farm I was unable to do any work. If I were to carry her on my back while weeding, she would have died. So, I said she [older daughter] should help me with the child and when she grows then she [older daughter] would go to the school.*

This mother was unable to work effectively on the farm and take care of her sick child at the same time. Without her work on the farm, it is possible that the family's subsistence might be jeopardised. Without attentive care for the sick child, her life might have been endangered. This mother's solution to the problem was to have her older daughter drop out of school to take care of the younger child. The older daughter, who is 10 years old, has not returned to school. Her older brother, who is 12 years old, still attends school.

For the most part, the children in this study who had dropped out of school have school-age siblings who attend school, as is the case with the family discussed above. Some of these children also had one or more siblings who had never attended school. In many instances, parents' choices about how to meet family labour and other needs, while also investing in schooling for some or all children, are grounded in assessments of how best to meet the family's needs. Often, decisions made about which child or children to withdraw from school are consistent with the expected gender and age patterns.

6.4 Circumstances surrounding dropout

Who has dropped out of school

This study was designed to collect information on roughly the same number of 5-15-year-old boys (21) and girls (22) who had dropped out of school. These children dropped out of school at various ages, from as early as age 5 through adolescence, and at all classes between nursery and JSS—although most of the children left school in the first several classes of primary school. Some of the children who dropped out had started nursery school as early as age 2, then continued to primary school. Others had started primary school over-age (at an age older than the target age for primary 1, which is age 6).

For each child who once attended school but who has since dropped out, parents were asked about the circumstances in which the child left school (see Table 6.1). Parents talked about what was happening at home and at school at the time children dropped out. Generally speaking, parents talked about circumstances at home and their influence on children's dropout,

and either did not have information about school factors that might have contributed to children's dropout or did not think school factors were influential.

Table 6.1. Factors in school dropout among boys and girls

Factor	Boys (N=21)	Girls (N=22)	Total (N=43)
The monetary costs of schooling.	12	8	20
The child's help was needed with domestic work, farming, or other work.	4	3	7
The child wanted to earn money or was asked to do so by parents.	1	3	4
The child did not want to continue school/preferred to do other things.	7	5	12
The child was seen or saw self as grown up or too old to be in school.	0	2	2

Note: For some children, more than one factor was said to have contributed to dropout. Information was collected for a total of 43 children (21 boys and 22 girls) age 5-16 who had dropped out of school.

The costs of schooling

The cost of schooling to families figured prominently among factors in pupil dropout. These costs include the monetary costs and the opportunity costs of schooling. The monetary costs of schooling to families may include school levies (for PTA, sports, culture, and the District Assembly), uniforms or other clothing bought for children to wear to school, shoes, furniture for children to use at school, exercise books, pens and pencils, and other school supplies, among other expenses. The opportunity costs of schooling include the value of the time that children spend on schooling that they could otherwise spend in support of the household. For instance, a child who is not in school could otherwise spend time taking care of younger brothers and sisters, farming, or earning money carrying firewood or doing 'by-day' labour. These monetary and opportunity costs of schooling may be difficult for some households to bear and may be so burdensome as to keep children from ever attending school or result in children leaving school.

Monetary costs. The burden of the monetary costs of schooling is substantial: Nearly half (20 of 43) of the children who had dropped out of school left at least partly because of the monetary costs of schooling. These costs include uniforms, furniture for children to use at school, and other school supplies. In one household in Tuasa four of five children have dropped out of school because of their father's illness and their mother's inability to pay for the costs of schooling. Their mother explained the situation and her children's reactions:

> *They all went to school and later dropped out. They all come and cry to me but I don't have money and their father too is ill. I said they should stop and if things improve, they would go back. Otherwise, they are all crying about school. But I can't even feed them, let alone buy a shirt for them.*

A father in Mallamkrom, who has supported 15 children in their schooling, made an appeal to the government for assistance with the costs of schooling as children move up through the school system:

> *Also what worries us is that today it is true that money is not difficult to come by, but everything is costly…A farmer doesn't enjoy pension pay, not even when your cocoa trees die or when you farm and grow old or you get to a certain stage*

where you are not strong and your children are many…I am pleading with the government to help those of us who are doing well, for our children to get some scholarships or some help so that in the future they can look after us, if we happen to live long.

Opportunity costs. For 26 percent (11 of 43) children, the opportunity costs of schooling were a factor in dropping out of school. The majority of these children were withdrawn from school, either temporarily or long term, because they were seen as providing important support to the family through their labour. In the communities under study, every able-bodied family member is expected to work and contribute to the family's livelihood, including even young children who may not be able to do heavy chores but can run errands for the older members of the family. Children age 10 or older may help carry farm produce back to the village, fetch water and cook the meals. Some of children, particularly the girls, may be required by their mothers to sell goods in the community. Older children engage in adult tasks and work alongside their parents. In the communities in the Wa District, younger boys herd the livestock, which is considered a child's job.

One of the boys was withdrawn to care for younger brothers and sisters, while two of the others were sent to farm and the fourth to operate a grinding mill. In explaining why he would not send his 12-year-old son back to school, a man in Nakore said:

In my opinion, I will say he should be helping me so that I can take care of the others.

All three girls who dropped out of school to help the household were withdrawn to care for younger brothers and sisters. The father of one of these girls did not want his daughter to drop out of school:

When you do not have enough to give to a woman, she also struggles on her own and then she will pull the daughter out to look after the baby while she carries stones. Since you do not have enough to feed her, you cannot talk.

In Nakore, several children either left on their own or were withdrawn from school to earn money. In one family, two girls were removed from school by their mother and sent to Kumasi to work and earn money for their marriage trousseau. Another girl stopped attending primary 1 to spend time carrying firewood to sell it in Wa.

In addition, a 15-year-old boy from Nakore explained that he left school to do "by day" work, or casual labour done on someone's farm for a short time.

When I was not going to school I used to do 'by day' and get money but when I was going to school I could not do that so I used to skip school to go and do the by day. That is why I stopped. I was getting money from the by day.

A child's lack of interest in schooling

For 28 percent (12 of 43) of the children who had dropped out, the child was no longer interested in continuing to attend school or was more interested in doing other things, such as farming or earning money. As the father of a 15-year-old boy in Nakore said, his son dropped

out of school because "his heart is no longer there." Now the boy farms and attends Koranic school because that is what he is interested in.

Another father in the same community described how his 14-year-old son came to drop out of primary 1. The man sent his son to school, wearing his school clothes, but often the boy would go to his grandmother's house instead. The boy refused to attend school regularly and his parents had difficulty monitoring his attendance. In the end, his parents "made him stand at one spot, going to farm," because:

> *If someone is a truant, always saying I have gone here, I have gone there, and you allow him [to do this] until he becomes an adult, he might even be doing some things but you won't know and when someone comes to tell you about them, you and he both will be embarrassed. So if you stand with him and you teach him this he will adhere to it.*

One young girl did not like how she was treated at school. A mother in Mallamkrom said that her 6-year-old daughter started attending nursery school as soon as she was weaned, but that she had since left school and refuses to go back because:

> *She said that the madam shouts at her when she goes to school and for that reason she was not going to attend school anymore.*

Some parents were perplexed as to why their children no longer wanted to attend. One mother in Wassa Mampong said that her 10-year-old daughter dropped out of school in primary 2, at age 9, without giving a reason. Her mother asked the interviewer what could be done to persuade her daughter to return, lamenting:

> *I have done everything possible but she says she will not go. If I had refused her something she asked for I would have been able to attribute it to that.*

Parents discussing these events were upset that their children refused to go to school. A couple of parents caned their children or threatened to have the police arrest them for not going to school, to no avail. Many parents concluded that there was little they could do to influence their children's decision not to attend. One father in Mallamkrom gave up trying to get his 14-year-old son to return to primary 4, saying, "I am tired of forcing him."

One mother in Degedege whose two daughters have dropped out of school, explained her quandary:

> *Children too, when you advise they don't understand the school issue you are talking of. Abigail said she does not see the benefit of schooling. Evelyn also started, went to some point and then said she does not want to go again. Because of that, the little boys do not want to go to school…When Evelyn started behaving like that, the teacher told me to take her hand and take her by force to school in the mornings, but me too, I work on the farm so I cannot leave my work every time and take her to school every day. So I told the teacher I cannot do that because she is not attending the school for my sake. If she goes it may help me in a way but if she will not go, I will not leave my farm work and take her to school.*

Outgrowing school-going age

There is evidence that, in many countries, adolescent girls are more likely than adolescent boys to leave school. Parents may see girls as mature and ready for marriage or for roles that exclude schooling, or girls may themselves make this judgment. Boys, by contrast, may not face these same pressures as early on in life.

In two cases, girls had dropped out of school because of the perception that they were too old to attend. In Degedege, the parents of a 15-year-old girl complained that after dropping out of primary 2, she refuses to return to school. The girl explained why she does not want to go back:

> *I had a lot of friends at school but I was too old being among little children so I was not happy. Some of them used to tease me so I lost interest. I also realised my father could not cater for me in my schooling if I continued.*

In Wassa Mampong, a 15-year-old girl lives with her father and stepmother. She started school at age 8 and reached primary 3, but was then taken by her mother to live with her maternal aunt. Her father thought his daughter was attending school in another village, but later learned that she had been selling corn by the roadside instead. Eventually, the girl returned to her father's house but did not return to school since she was 13 years old and, in her father's view, already "grown up." When the girl was asked about her reaction to not being in school, she replied:

> *When my friends are going, I cry so much.*

School quality

The quality of schooling is a multi-faceted concept, and can include both the outputs of schooling (such as what pupils learn and pass rates on examinations) and the inputs to schooling (such as school buildings, facilities, and infrastructure; school textbooks and learning materials; teacher qualifications). Parents' and pupils' perceptions of school quality may influence the decision to keep a child in school or withdraw a child from school.

Overall, while some parents were critical of the teaching and the results in schools their children attended, there was not a clear connection between their performance and dropout. The situation in Tuasa, though, was unusual in that several parents and community informants told stories about how others in the community were displeased that their school-going children spent time working on the school farm. According to one father, the former head teacher at the local school in Tuasa apparently was often absent from school to work on his farm, and took pupils with him. According to this father:

> *…he [the former head teacher] took the opportunity to go to his farm; he loved farming so much. At times he let a majority of the children leave the school and go to his farm. And the parents used to complain, wondering how they would get up and go to the farm leaving their children to go to school but they would not go to school and would rather be on someone else's farm. They felt that they [the children] should stop school and so that everybody would go to farm.*

The school farm or garden is designed to ensure that schooling should also emphasise the importance of agriculture and help to ground the school in the community. The school farm also generates an income for the school. In some cases, though, teachers have taken advantage of children as labour. However, none of the parents interviewed in Tuasa said that they had withdrawn their children from school because of the practice. In addition, parents generally were pleased with the new head teacher, who did not share the farming habits of the former head teacher. It is also important to note that no similar complaints were heard from parents in the other school communities interviewed.

In Degedege, parents were particularly critical of the quality of the local school. However, with the exception of one parent, other respondents did not connect the perceived school quality with children dropping out of school. This parent is dissatisfied with the school her children attend, in part because in the last few years, none of the JSS candidates has passed the examinations. She is also critical of poorly-equipped classrooms:

> *Presently where the school has gotten to it is already spoilt and I would have taken all my children out of the school if I could…The reason why the children are not interested in the school is because there is no furniture in the school. Some of the them sit on kitchen stools to write and so what at all can he/she learn?*

A father described the complaint of his son, who attends the local school:

> *One thing he always tells me is to take him out of this school to a school in another town because the school building is not good. The smell of sheep and goats is all over the classroom because they [the animals] sleep in the class and he is not happy about it. The floor too is not good so his uniform is always dirty when he comes back from school.*

This dissatisfaction with the school performance and/or school facilities may contribute to some children dropping out of school. The comments of parents and community informants, though, suggest that what is more likely is that pupils will transfer to higher-quality schools. The feasibility of transferring a child, though, depends on access to another school. If another school is close enough for the child to attend, or the child can be sent to stay with another household to attend school elsewhere, or the family can move closer to the preferred school, transferring the child is an option. For poorer families with more limited resources, these options may be few.

Access to schooling

In the six school communities studied, there is ready access to primary schooling. However, in both Nakore and Tuasa in the Wa District, and Wassa Mampong in the Mpohor East District, there is no Junior Secondary School (JSS) in the community and the nearest JSS is some distance away. The less accessible the nearest JSS is to a community, the less likely is it that pupils will make the transition from primary to JSS. The distances are such that children find it difficult to walk the distance to and from school each day, so children who persist to JSS either must find scarce transportation to school or a place to stay near the JSS. As one parent in Nakore explained:

What disturbs our children is the lack of a JSS. By the time they walk and reach Wa the Wa children would have already learnt something and after school they have to walk all the way back; they get very tired and cannot study [in the evenings]. That is what is drawing our children back. But the teachers are doing well.

The association between having a local JSS attached to the primary school and school dropout was clearly expressed by this parent in Nakore who was equally unhappy about the situation:

Right now because of a JSS most of our children have stopped school … there is no JSS [here]. If they [those due to attend JSS] are to walk to Wa to attend [school] and walk back everyday they see it as too difficult and they stop school. That is what is disturbing us.

In Wassa Mampong, the local school is over 50 years old. The pupils perform well on the performance monitoring tests and yet pupils often drop out because of the barriers to attending JSS six miles from home. The School Management Committee (SMC) chairman from Wassa Mampong explained:

However those from here who school at Daboase don't complete: after two terms you find them back walking around. The reason has to do with the long distance between here and Daboase, which is too long for a child to walk every day. Those who get places at Daboase to stay on the other hand have problems with those they stay with or just cannot cope there.

As it happens, the majority of the children age 5-15 in the study who had dropped out of school left school during the first four years of primary. For these children, the difficulty of making the transition to JSS was not listed among the factors in dropout.

6.5 Who decides children should drop out and how children respond

As discussed above, in some cases, parents determine that children should leave school. In these cases, children may or may not be consulted. One parent in Nakore, asked how his daughter responded to being withdrawn from school, replied, "She is a child, she couldn't say anything."

This father's response suggests that whatever his daughter's response was to dropping out, it was not particularly important or influential since she is a child. Other parents talked about their children's reactions to being withdrawn from school. A mother in Nakore, said of her 16-year-old son who was withdrawn to operate a grinding mill:

He wants school. Even now he still knows more than some of those in school. He really liked school.

Some children who were withdrawn from school were terribly upset, like the girl who was not allowed to return to school because she was seen to be beyond school-going age. In other instances, the children themselves decide to leave school. Children who had left school

because they were disinterested were often said to be "happy" about having left school, according to their parents.

6.6 Life after schooling

How children who have dropped out spend their time

School-age children in the six school communities visited do a significant amount of work to support the household, including domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, fetching water, and taking care of younger siblings, work on the farm, and income-generating activities such as selling firewood or produce. Children engage in these activities regardless of whether they attend school, with pupils fitting in tasks before and after school and on weekends, and children who do not attend school working longer hours.

Only a few parents said that their children did "nothing" after dropping out of school. A mother of a 10-year-old girl in Wassa Mampong who had dropped out described what her daughter does during the day:

> *When she gets up, she sweeps and that is all. She does not do anything.*

Later, the mother said that her daughter helps with selling goods at the market as well. Perhaps by comparison with chores she would like her daughter to do, the mother saw this assistance as minimal.

Learning a trade

Some parents said that they wanted their children who had left school to learn a trade, such as sewing or dressmaking. The 15-year-old girl in Wassa Mampong whose father would not send her back to school because she was seen as too old to go back, wants to return to school. Her stepmother suggests, though, that she learn a vocation instead.

Children also mentioned wanting to learn a trade. A 12-year-old girl who dropped out at the age of 9, explained:

> *When my father died, then my mother told me to stop schooling and I also understood and then said I'll stop and look after my siblings. When she gets money, then she [will] buy me a machine so I'll learn sewing.*

Many other parents, though, expected their children who had dropped out of school to continue the work they were doing at present—farming and taking care of domestic chores, in most instances.

6.7 Conclusion

The findings in these six study communities suggest that the decision to keep a child in school is not a one-time event, but rather a series of decisions at different points in time in response to family circumstances and parents' and children's preferences. Some households have been able to support children through primary school and in a few cases, even into JSS. Other households have considerable difficulty doing so, in spite of their desires to have their

children in school. In households that are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks—such as the death of a parent, family or child dislocation, or changing labour needs—a child may be withdrawn from school for a time. As the results suggest, some of these children later return to school after the situation has been resolved.

In other instances, problems are not resolved and children do not return to school. Chief among the reasons given for dropout are the family's inability to pay for the monetary costs of schooling (including uniforms, school furniture, and other fees and supplies) and the opportunity costs of schooling (the need for the child's labour).

Children may also decide to leave school, whether abruptly or over time, gradually missing more and more school until they stop altogether. Often, these children leave school in direct opposition to their parents' wishes. Information about why children decide to leave school is difficult to obtain, but there is evidence that children choose to drop out because "their hearts are no longer there," or they want to do other things (earn money, do other work).

Families in the study communities have great difficulty keeping all of their school-age children in school. At the time of the study, most of the households had one or more children in school and one or more children out of school. In most of these communities, where children's school attendance is negotiated in the context of family needs and children's preferences, achieving universal primary education is an enormously challenging and elusive goal.

CONCLUSIONS 7

This study was designed to examine how families with school-age children decide whether to send children to school, when to send them, and whether to keep children in school or withdraw them to do other things. The study focused primarily on household dynamics, but factors at school were also considered.

7.1 Parents' desire to have their children in school

Overwhelmingly, the parents interviewed consider schooling to be a good in and of itself and to be vital to their children's lives. Schooling is seen to hold promise for a better future, possibly leading children to wage-paying work, if they go far enough in school. Parents able to do so are willing to invest in schooling for their children, even in communities in which parents were extremely critical of the quality of the local school. The parents who were most critical of the local school considered the problems to be localised rather than systemic and did not generalise to the education system as a whole. Some of these parents suggested they might transfer their children to a different school, but none talked about removing their children from school altogether because of low school quality.

Despite parents' optimistic expressions about the benefits of schooling, a large proportion of parents seem unsure about being able to keep their children in school either because they cannot afford the expenses or because there is no secondary school nearby. Parents clearly hoped there children would remain in school as long as possible, but for most, that seemed to be limited to the completion of junior secondary school (JSS).

7.2 The difficulties of sending children to school and keeping them in school

While nearly all parents interviewed wanted to send their children to school and keep them in school, many have great difficulty doing so because of their inability to meet the costs of schooling. Between the monetary and the opportunity costs of schooling, households make significant sacrifices to send children to school. Households may have little access to the monetised economy, such that finding money to pay for school uniforms, tables and chairs, and other school supplies, is terribly difficult. In addition, school-age children are a vital part of household subsistence, providing help with domestic and productive work, and sometimes earning money to help support the household

Nevertheless, at the time of the study, most households had managed to put one or more children in school. Economically and socially vulnerable households, though, are particularly susceptible to economic shocks. A change in the family circumstances can mean that some children lose the chance to attend school at all, and other children are removed from school temporarily or permanently.

The results of the study make clear that children's access to schooling is dependent on family circumstances and that household decisions about schooling reflect the shifting economic

tides. A child may be enrolled in school as soon as money is available to buy a uniform, and that money may have been made available because an older sibling dropped out of school to help on the farm or to take care of younger siblings. The child withdrawn from school this year may later be able to return to school, once additional funds are available or when the labour needs are met by some other household member.

There are, of course, other reasons for children never attending school or dropping out of school. Children themselves may be unwilling to attend school, regardless of their parents' wishes. It is unclear if these children are responding to difficult situations in school (such as poor teaching, caning, or inadequate facilities) or other factors.

7.3 School readiness

In the households studied, parents do not see a child's school readiness as a point reached at some moment in time. Children are not considered ready for school solely because they have reached their sixth birthday, mastered the alphabet or shown an interest in going to school with their siblings. Although parents pointed to many distinct factors such as these when they discussed a child's readiness to start attending school, these factors seldom operated as the sole determinants of a child's school readiness. Instead, readiness seems to be understood by parents more as a process that involves a child's developmental progression situated in the ebb and flow of household circumstances. Readiness is determined by child-level factors as well as by the circumstances of the household. Parents often referred to child-specific characteristics as the main indicator that a child was ready to begin schooling.

Parents' assessment of readiness is unrelated to age, in part because most parents do not keep close account of age. Rather, parents' use other indicators of development to assess readiness for schooling. A child's maturity—ability to converse with others, follow directions, recite the ABC's, and other indicators of cognitive development—was often cited. A child's physical stature was also mentioned as a factor, with children being seen as ready to start school when they were the same size as others already attending school. Many parents were also willing to acquiesce to the judgment of the pre-school or school teachers who go from house to house to tell parents which children are ready to start school.

7.4 Gender differences and schooling

In the study communities, parents articulated the same perceived benefits of schooling for girls and for boys. Although parents expected their children to do different kinds of work as adults, there were the same high hopes of both boys and girls going far in school and achieving levels of schooling or training that would allow them to take professional jobs or engage in trades.

The reasons given for boys and girls dropping out of school were similar, though there were differences in the details. For instance, boys were more likely to have dropped out of school to do farm work and girls to take care of their younger siblings.

7.5 Policy recommendations

The tone and the content of the conversations generated by the questioning guide reveal households or family compositions that are fragile and vulnerable to any outside influence that

diminishes their resources. Shifts in the social fabric of Ghanaian society that ease the burden of subsistence can be expected to facilitate family efforts to keep children in school. Since the factors related to social and economic stability lie outside the purview of education interventions, they cannot form the basis of recommendations for improving school attendance.

- *Reduce the monetary costs of schooling to families*. In spite of efforts over the years to reduce the costs of schooling, these costs remain substantial and present a barrier to schooling for many children. Reducing or eliminating some of the costs of schooling to families (such as uniforms and footwear, book bags, miscellaneous school fees, tables and chairs for use at school, and other school supplies) would diminish the burden of the costs of schooling and make it less difficult for many families to send their school-age children to school.

- *Consider shifting district school calendars or the timing of the school day to minimise conflicts with children's work*. Children contribute to the support of their households, and some children do not attend school because of the need for their assistance at home. If school schedules were revised to allow children to help with planting and harvesting crops, for instance, some out-of-school children might be able to attend school. Such an approach would also reduce seasonal absenteeism among pupils.

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QUESTIONNAIRES

APPENDIX **A**

HOUSEHOLD DEMAND STUDY IDENTIFICATION SHEET:
PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

PLACE AND HOUSEHOLD
REGION _____
DISTRICT _____
LOCALITY _____
NAME OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD _____
TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED IN HOUSEHOLD …. ☐

RESPONDENT
NAME _____
SEX (circle)…… MALE FEMALE
AGE…….. ☐☐
WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING ? _____
HIGHEST LEVEL AND CLASS OF SCHOOLING ATTENDED (circle *one*)
KORANIC SCHOOL
NONE
PRIMARY : 1 2 3 4 5 6
SECONDARY : 7 8 9 10 11 12
HIGHER

INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEW INFORMATION
INTERVIEWER NAME _____
INTERVIEW STARTING TIME _____ COMPLETION TIME _____ TOTAL TIME _____

COMMENTS _____

_____

_____

Household Demand Study Questioning Guide:
Parents and Guardians

1. Household composition

- I would like to know who lives with you here in your home. Could you tell me who lives here and how old each person is?

	Age	Sex	Relation to respondent
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____
_____	___	___	_____

- I see you have mentioned ____ children who live here. Is that all of them?

SES [check one in consultation with Prof. Awedoba]

High _____ Medium _____ Low _____

2. Children's activities

- You talked about ____ children here. I'd like to know a little more about each one. I see the youngest one's name is _____. Can you tell me more about her/him?

- After _____ gets up in the morning, what does she/he do all day?

- How is _____'s health?

[For children age 5-15, if child's schooling history or status is not yet clear, ask:]
- Did _____ attend school last year, during the 2001-2002 school year?
- [If not] Has _____ ever attended school?

[Proceed to A, B, or C depending on child's schooling status]

A. Child has never been to school

- Who has _____ been spending time with recently?
- What has _____ been doing the past few months?
- What kind of help has _____ been giving you around the home? What about working on the farm, or at market, or with any other work?

- Do you plan to send _____ to school?
- [If 'yes'] When do you plan to send _____ to school?
- [If 'no'] How was it decided that _____ will not attend school?

- When _____ is an adult, what kind of work do you think he/she will do?

B. Child is attending school or attended last year (2001-2002)

- Tell me about how _____ did in school last year.
- Where do you get information about this? Do the teachers talk about her/him to you?

- What does _____ tell you about school?

- What things did you buy for _____ this past year for school? What kinds of fees did you have to pay for _____ in the last school year?

- Could you please think back to the time that _____ started school. How did you know she/he was ready to begin school? Who did you talk to about her/him starting school?
- How old was _____ when she/he started primary school?

- What class does _____ attend this year/did _____ attend last year?

- When _____ is an adult, what kind of work do you think he/she will do?

C. Child who used to attend school but left school at some point

- What does _____ do these days? Has she/he been spending a lot of time with friends?

- Has _____ been helping with work at home or doing other work? Can you tell me more?

- Tell me about what happened that ____ left school. What was happening here at home? What happened at school at that time?

- How did _____ respond to leaving school?

- What is the last class _____ attended before leaving school?
- How old was _____ when he/she left school?

- Could you please think back to the time that _____ started school. How did you know she/he was ready to begin school? Who did you talk to about her/him starting school?
- How old was _____ when she/he started primary school?

- When _____ is an adult, what kind of work do you think he/she will do?

3. Overall experience with local school

- Tell me about what you know about [name of local school/or school children attend]?
- Can you tell me about the headteacher?

- What contacts do you have with the teachers?
- Have you or anyone in your family helped out at the school this past year? Can you tell me more about how you have helped out?

HOUSEHOLD DEMAND STUDY IDENTIFICATION SHEET:
SELECTED CHILDREN AGE 12-15

PLACE AND HOUSEHOLD
REGION _____
DISTRICT _____
LOCALITY _____
NAME OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD _____
TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED IN HOUSEHOLD …. ☐

CHILD RESPONDENT
NAME _____
SEX (circle)…… MALE FEMALE
AGE…….. ☐☐
HIGHEST LEVEL AND CLASS OF SCHOOLING ATTENDED (circle *one*)
KORANIC SCHOOL
NONE
PRIMARY : 1 2 3 4 5 6
SECONDARY : 7 8 9 10 11 12

INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEW INFORMATION
INTERVIEWER NAME _____
INTERVIEW STARTING TIME _____ COMPLETION TIME _____ TOTAL TIME _____

COMMENTS _____

_____

_____

Household Demand Study:
Subjects to be discussed with Children age 12-15

Children who have never attended school

Children's activities

- How children spend their time (playing, working, etc.)
- Activities over last few months

School attendance

- Expect to ever attend school;
- [If so], when
- [If not], how decision made

Children who used to attend school but no longer attend

Children's activities

- How children spend their time (playing, working, etc.)
- Activities over last few months

School and school leaving

- Description of school child attended last (teachers, classes)
- School experience (whether enjoyed school, performance…)
- Age at dropout
- Circumstances surrounding school leaving (at school and at home)
- Reaction to leaving school (happiness, sadness….)

Children attending school or attended last year (2001-2002)

Children's activities

- How children spend their time (playing, working, school)
- Activities over last few months

School

- Description of school child attends (teachers, classes)
- School experience (whether enjoys school, performance…)
- School costs to family (things bought, fees and levies) last year

HOUSEHOLD DEMAND STUDY IDENTIFICATION SHEET:
COMMUNITY INFORMANTS

PLACE
REGION _____
DISTRICT _____
LOCALITY _____
NAME OF SCHOOL _____

RESPONDENT
NAME _____
SEX (circle)…… MALE FEMALE
AGE…….. ☐☐
POSITION IN COMMUNITY (circle one) CHIEF UNIT COMMITTEE MEMBER RELIGIOUS LEADER _____
WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING ? _____
HIGHEST LEVEL AND CLASS OF SCHOOLING ATTENDED (circle *one*) KORANIC SCHOOL NONE PRIMARY : 1 2 3 4 5 6 SECONDARY : 7 8 9 10 11 12 HIGHER

INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEW INFORMATION
INTERVIEWER NAME _____
INTERVIEW STARTING TIME _____ COMPLETION TIME _____ TOTAL TIME _____

COMMENTS

_____

_____

_____

Household Demand Study:
Subjects to be discussed with Community Leaders/Informants

Role as community leader

- Number of years in current position (chief, unit committee member, etc.)

Description of school

- Primary or basic school
- Number of teachers, their qualifications, performance
- School facilities

School-community relations

- SMC: activities
- PTA: activities

Resources and fund-raising

- Resources provided from the outside (government, NGOs, benefactors…)
- Resources from pupils and community
  - School fees and levies (describe)
  - Discuss recent occasion school needed to raise funds and how did it

Pupil enrolment

- Enrolment in surrounding community
- Measures to encourage children to enrol in school
- Reasons children do not enrol in school
- Reasons pupils drop out of school

HOUSEHOLD DEMAND STUDY IDENTIFICATION SHEET:
HEADTEACHER RESPONDENTS

PLACE AND SCHOOL
REGION _____
DISTRICT _____
LOCALITY _____
NAME OF SCHOOL _____

HEADTEACHER RESPONDENT
NAME OF HEADTEACHER _____
SEX (circle)…… MALE FEMALE
AGE…….. ☐☐

INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEW INFORMATION
INTERVIEWER NAME _____
INTERVIEW STARTING TIME _____ COMPLETION TIME _____ TOTAL TIME _____

COMMENTS

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Household Demand Study:
Subjects to be discussed with Headteachers

Professional career

- Number of years as headteacher at that school
- Number of years as headteacher elsewhere
- Teaching career: Number of years, subject(s) or classes taught
- Academic and professional qualifications

Description of school

- Primary or basic school
- Number of teachers, their qualifications, performance
- School facilities
- Contacts with Circuit Supervisor (visits, etc.)

School-community relations

- SMC: interactions with, operations of
- PTA: interactions with, breadth and nature of participation among parents

Resources and fund-raising

- Resources provided from the outside (government, NGOs, benefactors…)
- Resources from pupils and community
  - School fees and levies (describe)
  - Discuss most recent occasion needed to raise funds and how did it

Pupil enrolment

- Enrolment in surrounding community
- Measures to encourage children to enrol in school
- Reasons children do not enrol in school
- Reasons pupils drop out of school